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## A History of the Churches of Christ in Morgan County Kentucky

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1-1-1941

# A History of the Churches of Christ in Morgan County Kentucky

Luke Bolin

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A HISTORY OF THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST  
IN MORGAN COUNTY KENTUCKY

by

LUKE BOLIN

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree  
of Bachelor of Divinity in  
the College of Religion

Butler University  
Indianapolis  
1941

## FOREWORD

This thesis is the presentation of the history of the Churches of Christ in Morgan County, Kentucky, from their beginning to the present day. Although the term "Church of Christ" predominates in Morgan County, it will be used synonymously with the Christian Church in this thesis. The term "Disciples of Christ" will not be used, although it is the name of the brotherhood as given in the United States Census reports and the name on the Year Book.

Morgan County has an area of 413 square miles<sup>1</sup> and a population of 16,827.<sup>2</sup> It is located in the central eastern part of Kentucky, in the northwestern section of the southern Appalachian Mountains known as the Cumberland Plateau. The Licking River, creeks and branches have dissected it into low and narrow ridges until it retains little of the plateau character. The ridge lands rise to elevations ranging from 1200 to 1300 feet above sea level.

The inhabitants of Morgan County are of British Isles ancestry with a sprinkling of Germans and French Huguenots. The present population is 100 per cent American born with the exception of about half a dozen people. "Nigger Liz" is the only colored resident of the county.

My interest in the county, especially the churches, has existed for several years. This interest has been intensified by the utterly false conception that many outsiders (even the most of those who have written about the hills) have of the actual conditions in the southern

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<sup>1</sup>Jillson, W. R., The Geology and Mineral Resources of Kentucky, p. 289.

<sup>2</sup>U.S. Census, 1940.



Appalachian highlands. Some think that the mountaineers are the only real Americans and that they live in a veritable Eden, while others consider the life <sup>of</sup> the "hill-billies" as subsisting on cornbread and sow belly, as one round of deadly monotony and boredom disturbed only by occasional outbursts of fanatical emotionalism. Obviously, both positions are ridiculous.

I was born (Jan. 26, 1915) in Morgan County. Many of my ancestors were among the original settlers. Although I moved from the county at the age of seven, I have made numerous visits to my many relatives still living there. It has been my privilege to travel in thirty states and the British Isles; to study in five different colleges and universities. Consequently, I think that my native background and "outside" contacts put me in the position to present an unbiased history of Morgan County. While my first concern in this thesis is to present a history of the Church of Christ, the necessity of placing the church in its environment will not be overlooked.

To gather data for this thesis I have used the Butler University Library, the Indianapolis Public Library, the Indiana State Library, and the library of the College of the Bible at Lexington, Kentucky. I have also had access to the minutes of the Kentucky Christian Missionary Conventions from 1889 to 1917 and a few copies after that.<sup>1</sup> The minutes of the Annual Meetings of the Church of Christ from 1924 to 1940 were also at my disposal.<sup>2</sup> Actually though, little has been published about Morgan County and practically nothing about the Church of Christ. Dis-

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<sup>1</sup>Office of the Kentucky Christian Missionary Society, 806 Security Trust Building, Lexington, Ky.

<sup>2</sup>In possession of the secretary of the Annual Meeting, Mrs. Ova Maxey, Elamton, Ky.

covering the paucity of secondary source material, I was forced to go to Morgan County and to gather the greater part of my data from original source materials. In June, 1940, I spent ten days visiting every Church of Christ in the county and preaching one night for the most of them. I studied the church books and searched out the old people in each congregation to talk with them. My visit also led me to talk with the leaders of the other communions of the county, and to gather several copies of the minutes of Baptist Associations. In September, 1940, I attended the Annual Meeting of the Church of Christ. The correlating of the collected data led me to spend a few more days in the county in March, 1941. Besides this, I have written and received numerous letters concerning the churches and preachers.

The Year Book of Disciples of Christ has not been quoted. Few churches in the county ever make any report to the Year Book Publication Committee. This forces people who know little about the local situation to guess at the conditions. Thus, some of the statistics are reliable, but many of them are more confusing than enlightening. As examples we may note the following errors. In 1923 the Year Book reported that the White Oak Church had 218 members. The following year the church reported only seventy-five members to the Annual Meeting.<sup>1</sup> In the 1919 edition of the Year Book the list of Morgan County churches included Elk Creek with 180 members and "Gollash" with 55. Both refer to the same church. The Gollash (Colosse) Church is located on a tributary of Elk (Fork) Creek. The same Year Book reported the New Hope Church with 66 members and A. J. Williams as minister; and the Lacy Creek Church with 70 members and W. J. Beculhimer as minister.

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<sup>1</sup> Minutes of Annual Meeting, 1924.

Now, the New Hope Church is located on Lacy Creek and there is just the one church.

I wish to express my deepest appreciation to all who have so willingly assisted me in gathering the necessary data for this thesis. The list is too long to mention, but due credit shall be given in the footnotes and bibliography.

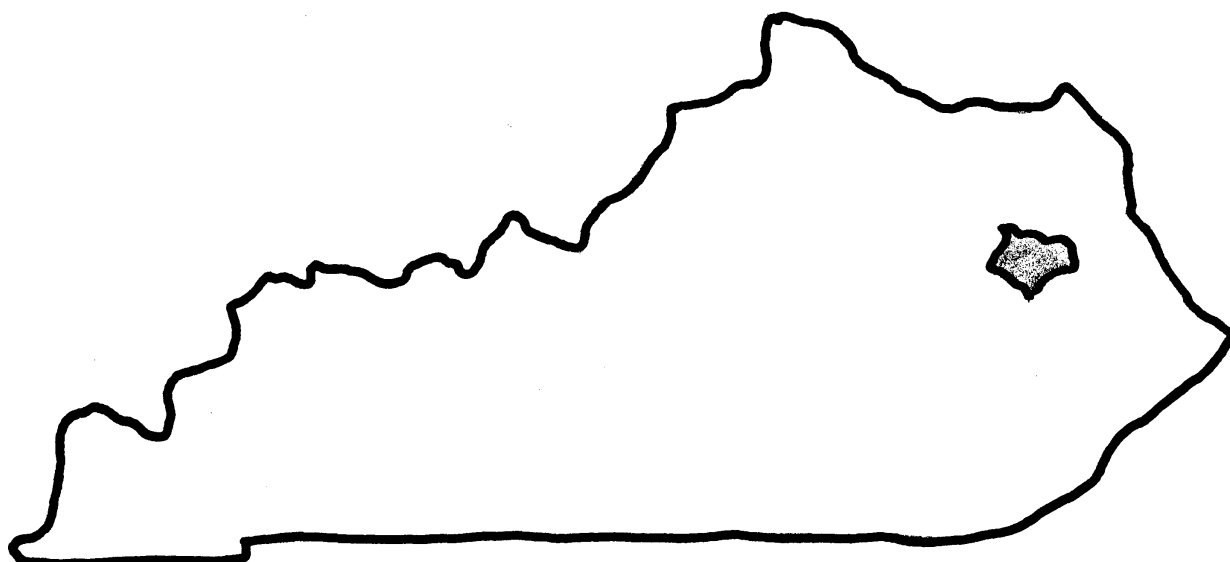
## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
FOREWORD . . . . .	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS. . . . .	vi
 Part I: THE SETTING	
Chapter 1: SOCIAL AND GEOGRAPHIC. . . . .	1
<p>Early settlements --- Formation of county --- State road ---  County roads --- Attempt to ship coal down the Licking River ---  Early education --- Civil War --- Guerilla bands --- Continued isola-  tion --- Increase in population --- Emigration --- Industry enters  the county --- Railroads, mines, mills --- Industry leaves --- Its  effect --- Last twenty-five years --- Great War --- Small mills and  "coal banks" --- WPA --- Farming --- Modern highways --- Progress in  education --- Summary.</p>	
Chapter 2: RELIGIOUS . . . . .	19
<p>Baptist Churches --- United Baptists --- Enterprise Associa-  tion of Regular Baptists --- Regular Primitive Baptists --- Mission-  ary Baptists --- Summary of Baptists --- Methodist Churches ---  Holiness Groups --- Presbyterian Churches --- Missionaries.</p>	
 Part II: THE HISTORY	
Chapter 3: GROWTH OF CHURCHES OF CHRIST. . . . .	30
<p>John Smith brought Restoration Movement --- White Oak the  first church --- Joseph Nickell the first local preacher ---  Opposition of Baptists --- Old Grassy Church --- Blackwater Church ---  Aim of the churches --- Beginning of Annual Meetings --- Regular mon-  thly meetings --- A church at West Liberty --- Three churches just  after Civil War (Blairs Mills, Toms Branch, Salem) --- The ministry ---  Conduct of meetings --- Conduct of Annuals --- Social phase of Annuals  --- Growth during the 1880's --- D. G. Combs --- Williams Creek Church  --- Bethany Church --- Construction of buildings --- Hazel Green  Academy --- Kentucky Christian Missionary Society takes active part  in evangelization --- J. M. Downing, Eastern Kentucky Evangelist ---  Jack Howard and the "Church of God" movement --- Harmful effect upon  the churches --- Tragedy of it --- Church of Christ largest religious  group in county --- New Hope Church --- Adele Church --- Cannel City  and Wrigley Churches --- W. H. Book debates Jacob Dietzler at West  Liberty --- New church house --- Cannel City and Wrigley stranded ---  Adele Church dies --- Licking River Church born and dies --- The  Lord's Supper --- "Paying the preacher" --- Typical meeting --- Con-  duct of Annual Meetings --- Relative strength --- Indigenous character.</p>	

	Page
Part III: THE ITEMIZATION	
Chapter 4: LOCAL HISTORIES. . . . .	53
White Oak --- Old Grassy --- Blackwater --- West Liberty --- Blairs Mills --- Salem --- Toms Branch --- Williams Creek --- Bethany --- Lacy Creek --- Adele --- Cannel City --- Wrigley --- Licking River.	
Chapter 5: BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES OF PREACHERS . . . . .	78
Joseph Nickell --- Dr. Daniel Dillon --- Harry Little --- John D. Bays --- Raney C. Maxey --- William Leander Lacy --- W. Cebren Nickell --- Bruce Adkins --- Jack Howard --- Other preach- ers --- H. G. Haney --- F. W. Long --- Dewey H. Havens --- Orville W. Williams --- John William Dunn --- Thomas Albert Rasnick --- H. H. Collins --- James Lawson --- Harlen Murphy --- R. Hickman Nickell --- Jerry Kellas Bolin --- James Franklin Walters --- "lay preachers" --- Daniel Boone Williams' prayer --- Young preachers.	
SUMMARY: CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS. . . . .	98
Irregularity in observance of Lord's Supper --- Elders and deacons --- Little stress on Sunday Schools --- Type of evangelism --- Weakness of Annuals --- Failure to "pay the preachers" --- Churches established in isolated society --- Isolation disappearing --- Churches failing to keep up.	
BIBLIOGRAPHY. . . . .	104

THE STATE OF KENTUCKY

Showing the Location  
of Morgan County



**Part I: THE SETTING**

**Chapter 1: SOCIAL AND GEOGRAPHIC**

**Chapter 2: RELIGIOUS**

A HISTORY OF THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST  
IN MORGAN COUNTY KENTUCKY

Chapter 1: SOCIAL AND GEOGRAPHIC

The present confines of Morgan County were traversed by surveying and hunting parties as early as 1787, but the year of the first permanent settlement is unknown. About 1800 several families from central Kentucky moved into the region. Some came because of the abundance of wild game and others because of cheap land. This region was not touched by the main trails across the mountains so the people came in from the west. Later, new trails were opened up and people came directly from east of the mountains. This circuitous route is illustrated by the pilgrimage of the Nickell family. In 1745 John Nickell, a Scotch-Irishman, came from Northern Ireland to Augusta County, Virginia. Later some of his sons emigrated to Greenbriar River (West Virginia). In 1788 one of them, with five of his sons, came on to central Kentucky. A few years later some of them turned east and settled within the present borders of Morgan County. One of the Nickells owned two hundred acres of land in Bourbon County, but his dislike of farming plus the scarcity of game caused him to trade his farm for two bear dogs and a rifle and move to Morgan County. Here he found plenty of game, so he stayed.<sup>1</sup>

A large number of the pioneer settlers of Morgan County were Revolutionary War soldiers. I could not find that the land was given to them for their services, but some of it may have been. It seems more in keeping with known conditions to suppose that some of them had difficulty in establishing titles to their land in central Kentucky, and being dispossessed, they came

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<sup>1</sup>Nickell, Joe, History of the Nickell Family, Topeka, Kansas, 1932; current local tradition.



back into the hills and bought land from the state for ten cents an acre. Here they could be sure of their holdings. This, of course, held true for the other settlers as well as the soldiers.

After the initial settlement around 1800 the population steadily increased and as it did the need of a local government became apparent. For some time every man was a law unto himself and his rifle enforced the law. By 1822 the need of a local government was so keenly felt that a group of the citizens sent a petition to the Kentucky Legislature asking for the formation of a new county. They proposed to call it Morgan to perpetuate the name of General Daniel Morgan of Revolutionary War fame. Probably some of the citizens had served under him. The legislature granted the petition, and out of Floyd and Bath Counties, Morgan was formed in 1823. West Liberty was made the county seat and in 1826 a court house was built.<sup>1</sup>

The population of the county in 1830 was 2859, but its area was much larger than at the present time. The native population was increasing and new settlers were arriving in large numbers. The population had risen to 4,063 in 1840. In spite of the fact that Morgan lost some of its territory to Johnson County in 1843, when the latter was formed, the population continued to rise. The census for 1850 showed 7,620 people. The number continued to climb and in 1860 reached 9,237, notwithstanding the fact that Morgan lost some more territory when Rowan County was formed in 1856.<sup>2</sup>

Let us go back a little and look at the roads in the county. An act of the Kentucky Legislature in 1817 named three commissioners

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<sup>1</sup>Licking Valley Courier Supplement, Dec. 27, 1923.

<sup>2</sup>U.S. Census Reports.

to "view, survey and mark a road lying on the nearest and best way" from Mount Sterling to Prestonsburg and on to the Virginia line to meet a road constructed by that state. The Greenbriar and Wilderness trails were already being used as routes of commerce to the east, but this new road was to be shorter than either (and it passed through the county). Soon work began and in the early 1820's it was suitable for use.<sup>1</sup> Wagons pulled by oxen traveled upon it and stock (especially hogs and cattle) was driven over it in large numbers to market east of the mountains. This meant a great deal to Morgan County as it gave an outlet for livestock and established faster communication with the central part of the state.<sup>2</sup>

According to the modern conception of paved highways, this road was no better than a trail. We must remember though, that no parts of the whole country had very good roads. Trees were felled and cleared out, some of the steepest places were graded, and fords were established at shallow places in the streams. Improvements were made year by year and by 1839 a few bridges had been built. In the summer time the road was dusty but traversable. During the winter, mud and swollen streams made traffic extremely difficult and often impossible. By 1850 other markets and other trade routes to the old markets had opened up for central Kentucky. The old state road ceased to be used for interstate commerce. Consequently, the state withdrew its support and the counties through which it passed took it over. From the first, the county had been interested in roads but its lack

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<sup>1</sup>Verhoeff, Mary, The Kentucky Mountains, Transportation and Commerce 1750 to 1911. Vol. I, pp. 148-156.

<sup>2</sup>I have no proof but it seems reasonable that this "opening up" of this section had some bearing on their desire to form a new county.

of funds, and crude system of building and maintaining them, had produced only the poorest kind of roads. Each district had an overseer and all men were supposed to work a certain number of days each year on the roads. This might be to build new ones or improve the old. While the state road was supported by the state, it was in about the same condition as the roads in the Blue Grass, but when it reverted to the county its condition sank to the level of the county roads. Just how poor these roads were is hard for us to realize. Often they were in the middle of the small streams, and when they were supposed to be on dry land, they crossed the streams every few yards. One road is reported to have crossed a stream forty-seven times on a six mile stretch!<sup>1</sup>

In 1848 an attempt was made to use the Licking River as a route of commerce. A boat load of coal was taken out and marketed at Paris. In the following years a few more boat loads were shipped but the river proved to be too swift and crooked to permit success of this scheme.

Having considered the political beginning of the county and the road system, let us glance at the education system. Kentucky became a state in 1792 and in 1803, public lands were appropriated to establish colleges and seminaries. Many were established but few lasted any time because of lack of support, and in many instances the land was used for other purposes. At the beginning of Morgan County the court attempted to establish a seminary and had the donated land surveyed. Trustees of the proposed institution were appointed. The land was sold, but the amount it brought or what the court did with the money is unknown "but it is certain that no part of it was used for educational purposes, and no such institution as the Morgan County

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<sup>1</sup> Statement by J. K. Bolin.

Seminary was ever endowed, or had any existence, only in name."<sup>1</sup>

The plain fact is that early Kentucky did little for education. The state left it up to the counties and they in turn left it up to the districts. The report of the Kentucky Educational Commission in 1921 summarizes conditions in the following terms:

The district voted a school, fixed its own taxes, and elected its own trustees, who constructed the schoolhouse, employed the teacher, fixed her salary, and determined the length of the term--in short, managed the school.<sup>2</sup>

In June 1840 Bishop B. B. Smith, Superintendent of Public Instruction, in a published communication stated that in Floyd County there were 2,055 children of school age (five to fifteen), but that not one was in school. Pike County had only twenty-five in school out of 1,066 who were eligible. In the whole state only 32,920 were in school out of 170,000 that should have been.<sup>3</sup> While Collins, who gives these figures, does not mention Morgan County it seems in keeping with known facts to assume that the situation was similar to that existing in Floyd and Pike Counties. Sometime after this, schools were established all over the county. The three-month term was sufficient to teach the fundamentals of the three R's and this was considered enough education. In order that the teacher might be sure that his students were studying, they read their lessons aloud and thus gained the nickname of "blab schools." Now, the establishment of these schools revealed some progress in the direction of formal education but actually the greatest amount of education was carried on in the home. The

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<sup>1</sup>Col. J. T. Hazelrigg in Licking Valley Courier Supplement, Dec. 27, 1923.

<sup>2</sup>Public Education in Kentucky, p. 28.

<sup>3</sup>Collins, Lewis & R. H., History of Kentucky, Vol. I, p. 45.

mother taught her daughter how to cook and care for the house, how to make clothes and raise a garden. The father taught his son how to farm, how to cut trees and hunt. These practical things were the essentials in that primitive society.

Briefly glancing at the situation just prior to the Civil War we find a rural isolated society. The forests supplied the people with logs to build their houses, with plenty of fuel and an abundance of wild game. Their clothing was made from the skins of animals or from wool grown on their own sheep or from flax grown in their own gardens. Most of their food was produced on their own farms. Coffee, salt and calico were about all that was imported. On the whole, they were self-supporting and retained only limited contact with the outside world.

Now we come to the horrible Civil War and must examine its effect upon Morgan County. Slaves had been introduced at an early date and in 1840 there were sixty-one in the county. There were 187 in 1850 and in 1860 there were 170 slaves and eighty-one free Negroes.<sup>1</sup> This was the largest number of slaves in any mountain county. With the rest of the state the county tried to remain neutral, but such a struggle could not be indifferently ignored. The citizens took sides in thoughts and actions, for some went north and some went south to join the armies. As we might expect from the number of slaves in the county, a considerable number was in favor of the South. In fact, some rebels openly ran for public offices!<sup>2</sup>

At different times both Northern and Southern soldiers crossed

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., Vol.II, p. 259.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., Vol. I, p. 108.

the county and three small skirmishes were fought near West Liberty. In 1862 the court house and clerk's office were burned. Thus many valuable documents went up in flames. At different times small bands of guerillas entered the county. Sometimes local men formed guerilla bands and killed a few sympathizers of the opposite side. In the last year of the war the rebels became so strong that many Union sympathizers had to leave the county. This local guerilla activity embittered the people to the extent that it lingered after the war was over.

There is not much to write about the period from the close of the war to the opening of the twentieth century. The isolated self-supporting conditions continued. The Negroes left the county in a hurry, for out of the 251 in 1860 only forty-four remained in 1870.<sup>1</sup> In that ten year period the population decreased from 9,237 to 5,975, but this was largely because the county had been further broken up by the formation of four new counties--Magoffin and Wolfe in 1860 and Elliot and Menifee in 1869.<sup>2</sup> This also partially accounts for the decrease in the number of Negroes. After this brief decrease the population steadily increased the rest of the century. In 1880 it was 8,455 and 11,249 in 1890. The report for 1900 listed 12,792 people.

About the beginning of the new century, movements began which have vitally affected the life of the county. The first was the exodus of large numbers of people. To a lesser degree this had been continuing all through the past century. In the 1890's the stream

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., Vol. II, p. 261.

<sup>2</sup>Not all of the territory in any of the new counties came from Morgan but in each instance a considerable amount of it did.

of emigrants rapidly expanded as hundreds went to Oklahoma and Texas to homestead land. This stream grew still larger as others left for "public works" (mines, mills, factories, etc.). They went to the Hazard coal fields, to the Big Sandy, to Northern Kentucky, to Ohio, Indiana and Illinois. Now, many of these people were among the best citizens, therefore the county suffered by losing them.

At this same time outside capitalists began to exploit the natural resources of the county. The Ohio and Kentucky Railroad constructed a branch line from Jackson to Licking River in Morgan County. Another branch line, known as the Morehead, Northfork and Lennox Railway, was built from Morehead to Lennox. The first came from the south and the latter from the north. These two railroads provided adequate transportation for the marketing of coal and timber. In 1901 the Kentucky Block Cannel Coal Company (head offices in New York) began operations in Cannel City. At first they employed a small number of men, but as they enlarged the mine and put in more machinery the number of employees increased. In 1923 they were employing about two hundred men and mining approximately 50,000 tons per year. This railroad was also used to haul timber products. Two passenger trains, hauling passengers, freight and mail, made the trip daily.<sup>1</sup>

The railroad that connected the county with Morehead was largely used to haul timber products. For years and years the Licking River had been used to raft logs. They would be taken to mills at Farmers or other places down the river. The great tracts of virgin timber, however, were sufficient to warrant the building of railroads

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<sup>1</sup>Licking Valley Courier Supplement, Dec. 27, 1923.

and mills. About 1902 the Roper-Reece Lumber Company constructed a band mill on Mordica Creek and began work. After cutting out the best timber there they moved up to Lennox and built an electric double band mill. It was claimed to be one of the best in the state. This company employed about 150 men the year around. During the tan-bark season the number of employees doubled or trebled.<sup>1</sup>

At Lennox a good sized village arose. The company built houses for its laborers; constructed a large hotel and commissary. The payroll was large and the community prospered. Practically the same thing happened at Cannel City and several other mushroom towns sprang up along the railroads.

In 1921 the Premium Cannel Coal Company (head offices at Mt. Sterling) began operations on Rush Branch of Elk Fork. Here was a large coal field that had been mined to some extent for many years. In 1876 a block of coal sixty-seven inches square was taken to Philadelphia to be exhibited at the Centennial Exposition and was awarded the gold medal.<sup>2</sup> Notwithstanding bright prospects, the company lasted only a few years.

At Cannel City the mining industry lasted a much longer time. In 1923 it was prophesied that the coal would last twenty or thirty years longer. In a few years, though, the operations slacked up and in less than fifteen years the coal tipple was torn down and the company gone.

By 1923 the mill at Lennox had cut out the best timber, and for this reason it too ceased operation. A few men were employed to

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<sup>1</sup>Statement by J. K. Bolin, who was an employee of the Roper-Reece Lumber Co. for several years.

<sup>2</sup>Licking Valley Courier Supplement, Dec. 27, 1923.



load the lumber already cut. This lasted five or six years. Gradually the mill and village were torn down.

The people who moved into the villages around the mines and mills were almost all from Morgan County. A few came from adjoining counties and only a fraction from the "outside." When the industries left, these people were stranded. What were they to do? Some left the county to go to "public works" at other places, but the majority went back to their farms (if they had not sold them). The once prosperous villages dwindled. Lennox reverted to farming country. The town of Cannel City still remains, but it is a ghost of its former self.

Now the railroads lingered longer than the mills and mines. Their main source of income gone, they continued to haul some freight and passengers. Their combination freight-passenger trains gradually decreased in number. The condition of the tracks became very bad. For a few years there ran from Morehead to Wrigley a motor-coach known as the "Goose." Finally, all trains were taken off the run, even the Goose ceased flying and the tracks were taken out.

Now, as the industries are gone we may inquire about their effect upon the life of the county. Such companies are often accused of exploiting the natural resources, and the people too, without making adequate compensation. Was that the case here? Many factors are to be considered.

I wish to say, at first, that the companies paid reasonable prices for the natural resources. They paid their laborers fair wages. Before their coming, the coal and timber meant little to the owners, so the companies made it possible for them to realize something from the resources with which the Creator had blessed them.

Thus, for land, leases and wages many dollars were brought into the county. This made it possible for the people to buy more manufactured goods which could easily be brought in by the railroads. These factors may cause us to assume that the standards of living were greatly raised. Certainly the people could afford many things that they could not before. Some earned more money in a month than they had previously earned in a year. The amount of money alone does not determine the standard of living, however.

Until investigation, I assumed that the coming of the railroads lowered the price of transporting manufactured goods. There is no doubt that it did increase the volume but to my surprise, many stores continued to haul their merchandise by wagon, as they had been doing. In many cases it was actually cheaper. My father, J. K. Bolin, tells of hauling "goods" from Morehead to Florress-- a distance of thirty-five miles. It took him almost three days to make the trip. Twelve hundred pounds was considered a good load. He received from \$.50 to \$1.00 per hundred, depending upon the weather. He hauled before the coming of the railroads and continued to haul after they came.

Did the people have better food and clothing and live in better houses? Did they have better churches to attend and better schools for their children? My answer is "No." Their houses were quickly and crudely thrown together. Their clothing may have been a little better, but not much. On the farms they raised their own gardens, canned their own fruits, milked their own cows and butchered their own hogs--in short, were largely self-supporting. In the villages, they had to buy every bite they ate. These things took about all their money. A living was all they had, whether they worked

on the farm or in the mill, and it was much harder to earn in the mill. When they returned to their run-down mountain farms, the most of them were poorer than when they left. As to education and religion, there was not a great deal of difference. The companies showed little interest in either. Their supreme motive in going into the county was to make money and that was all. I am not condemning them, but stating the facts. Only in one case did I discover anything done by them for the cultural and religious benefit of the people. At Cannel City the coal company permitted its carpenters to construct a church building when the supplies were furnished by the Christian people.

The railroads, mills and mines came and disturbed the slumbers of the county. When they left, the county returned to its former ease, although poorer in natural resources. Their permanent effect upon the county was limited. Maybe we are justified in giving them credit for first introducing the county to the world beyond its borders.

Now we come to the last twenty-five years. The population in 1910 was 16,259 and in the next ten years it only increased to 16,513. The next decade saw a decline to 15,130. This was largely because of the exodus of a large number from the county. In 1940 it reached the peak of 16,827 largely because the depression had driven many from the factories back to the home county. This "modern era" is extremely interesting but very difficult because of its closeness to us. At the present time the country is in the midst of tremendous changes. Good roads, cars, radios, daily papers, etc., are swiftly bringing the county out of its century of comparative isolation. Scientific farming is being introduced by the county

agent and through the schools. Education is still far behind the standards of the United States, but is making great progress.

During the Great War, Morgan County contributed 348 soldiers, many of whom saw action abroad. Twenty of these did not return and twenty-four were wounded severely.<sup>1</sup> While in other parts of the country and overseas these men saw how other people lived and this inspired many of them to make improvements when they returned home. I do not know just how far we can press this idea, but I am confident that it must be considered.

As stated above, the main industries have left the county. The big coal mines have given place to dozens of "coal banks," which may be worked by two or twenty men. Often they supply fuel for the farm, but a considerable amount of coal is hauled by truck to local markets and to central Kentucky. While the best timber is cut out, there are a few small tracts of timber suitable for market and a considerable amount of second growth. Several small mills are dispersed through the county. Different oil and gas companies have drilled wells in the county and some of them have produced in paying quantities and qualities, but in reality, they have not proved much of an asset to the county. They may be more fully developed in future years. The big industry in Morgan County is farming. The county is predominantly rural and has only one town close to 1,000 population and that is West Liberty. As has been the condition since the founding of the county, the great majority of the people make their living at farming. The Works Progress Administration has supplemented this during the last few years. The National Youth Association has

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<sup>1</sup>Licking Valley Courier Supplement, Dec. 27, 1923.

sponsored several projects in the county. Hundreds of boys have gone to the Civilian Conservation Corps camps. In the second quarter of 1933 eighty-six per cent of the people were receiving some kind of government relief.<sup>1</sup> This dropped to thirty-six per cent in the third quarter and has continued close to that until the present time. At present an average of about 350 men work the year around on WPA. They work sixteen days per month--the common laborers receive \$32.10 and the skilled laborers up to \$56.<sup>2</sup> The relief agencies in the county have built roads, schools and waterworks. They have sponsored clerical projects, homemaking centers, etc. While these have really meant a great deal to the county, of necessity they cannot be permanent. The progress and hope of the county must lie in the realm of agriculture. The crude methods of farming to raise enough to "get by" must give place to better ones. The farmers must learn to raise better livestock and get more from their soil, and in doing so, lift their standard of living.

Mr. Yander Wrather, the county agent, is trying desperately to bring this about. He is being helped by the schools, in which there are seventeen 4H Clubs with five hundred members. The picture of the average farm, as given by Mr. Wrather, will give a good conception of the farming condition.<sup>3</sup> On the 3,150 farms there are only half dozen tractors. The average farm contains sixty-five acres and is worth about \$1300. The dwelling house is worth about \$300. Between five and six people are supported by each farm. For each farm there are

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<sup>1</sup>L. S. Dodson, Living Conditions and Population Migration in Four Appalachian Counties. p. 46.

<sup>2</sup>Mrs. Opal Elam, Referral Agent of WPA at West Liberty.

<sup>3</sup>Statement by Yander Wrather, March, 1941.

one-third of one sheep, 3.5 head of cattle, 1.5 head of work stock, 25 hens, .8 acre of tobacco, 8 acres of corn, 3 of wheat, oats, rye, and sorghum. The principal cash income is the \$100 received from tobacco. The total income is approximately \$600. When this is compared to the typical American family's income of \$1,160 to support four people, the low standard of living of the average farm family is quickly discerned.<sup>1</sup>

To continue the modern aspects of the county, let us look at their roads. The first mile of improved roads was built less than a quarter of a century ago. Seeing that West Liberty needed a road to connect it with a railroad, County Judge J. H. Sebastin (1918-22) persuaded the county to build one. It extended from West Liberty across the Index Hill and to the railroad at Index, a distance of two and one-half miles. This caused a great commotion among the people. They complained at the expense and said that the county would never get out of debt. Nevertheless, a good thing was started, and once started, it has continued to this day. By 1924 the road had been extended to the Menifee County line. Soon contracts were let for a road going east to the Magoffin line. The other counties were having roads constructed through them at the same time and by 1928 a good highway traversed the county and connected it with the Big Sandy Valley on the east and the Blue Grass on the west. While the county began this building, the most of the credit must go to the state.

The state has constructed many more miles of road in the<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Consumer's Guide, Sept., 1938. The statistics are for the year 1935-1936 and would be a little higher for the present.

<sup>2</sup>Statement by Ova Haney in Licking Valley Courier, May 30, 1940.

county. The WPA had built thirty-eight miles of country to market roads by May, 1940. It is still busy constructing new roads and improving old ones. Not all points in the county have been reached, but the most important ones have, and the road system is constantly expanding. The importance of these roads will be seen if we remember that there are no railroads in the county. What products that are taken to market and what manufactured goods are to be brought in must be by highway. Highways are seldom luxuries and in Morgan County they are absolute essentials.

I have already shown that education got a poor start in Kentucky, and especially in the mountains. As Morgan is one of the mountain counties, what is the condition there at the present time? In the Kentucky Constitution of 1891 we find a mandate requiring the General Assembly to "provide for an efficient system of common schools throughout the state." In 1893 laws were passed to do this, but it was not until 1904 that any taxes were levied for this purpose and not until 1908 was this legislation made general for all local units.<sup>1</sup> While this is a very brief statement of the facts, I do not wish to minimize their importance, for these laws changed education from a voluntary to a compulsory system. The state finally realized that the counties by themselves could not provide educational facilities and that the districts should not be left to themselves to conduct such educational systems as they chose. Even these good laws did not produce miracles but they did commit the state to act in supplying adequate schools.

Morgan, as with all the counties, benefitted from the state's

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<sup>1</sup>Public Education in Kentucky, p. 8.

interest, but the most physical progress has been made in the last eight years. Thanks to WPA and the educational leaders in the county, sixteen new school buildings have been constructed. The estimated worth of these is \$400,000 but has cost the county only \$25,000.

The three county high school buildings are among the new ones and are made of native stone. The one at West Liberty is claimed to be the best high school in the mountains, and one would have to travel a long way to find one more beautiful. There is also a high school at Ezel run by a religious group. Remembering that good roads make it possible to haul students long distances to schools, the school system in Morgan is the best it has ever been. Before getting too optimistic, however, I will state a few sobering facts about the school system. For the school year 1939-1940 there were 4,187 students enrolled in the ninety schools of the county--an average of 46.5 students per school. Of the ninety schools only six have four or more rooms, one has three rooms and fourteen have two. The remaining sixty-nine are one room buildings.<sup>1</sup> The high schools last nine months but the others only seven. The latter would mean 140 days of school, but the average pupil attends between 80 and 90 days. The average teacher's salary is about \$500 per year. Truly, commendable progress has been made but these facts make us realize that a deplorable condition still exists.

Realizing that religion does not exist in a vacuum, I have tried to give a brief history of Morgan County as a preparation for my main interest. The church is not a separate segment of life; it

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<sup>1</sup>These figures were received from Mr. Ova Haney, Morgan County Superintendent of Schools, in June, 1940.



is inseparably a part of the society in which it is placed. For over a century, Morgan was one of the isolated counties of the Southern Appalachian Region. Recent developments are destroying that isolation. More progress has been made in the last twenty-five years than in the whole hundred before them. Morgan will soon take its place among the more progressive counties in the state. Its future economy must be based upon agriculture supplemented by forest and mine products.

## Chapter 2: RELIGIOUS

### Baptist Churches

Elder Daniel Williams died July 3, 1820 Age<sup>d</sup> 57:Y 4:M

The de<sup>d</sup> emigrated to Kentucky May 1775 and servd as a pastor of various churches of United Baptist during his life

That is the inscription on the tombstone at the Caney Cemetery of the first preacher in the county. About 1800 he moved to the region and built a house. Soon he gathered a few of his scattered neighbors together and preached to them. In 1808 he found enough members to organize a church, the first in the county. It was located on White Oak Creek but two years later was moved to its present location on Caney Creek.<sup>1</sup> It is known as the South Fork Church. As the population increased more churches were established. They were all Baptists, and belonged to the North District Association. Because of distance, Daniel Williams led in the establishment of an association closer home in 1814. It was known as the Burning Spring Association, named after the Burning Spring Church (in Magoffin County). The association had eleven churches and 403 members. For some time they were "in correspondence" with the parent association in central Kentucky.<sup>2</sup>

In 1837 the Burning Spring Association was held at Middle Fork Meeting House. It reported thirteen churches and 604 members.<sup>3</sup> Some of the preachers thought that the association was getting too large, so they made plans to form a new one. Consequently, the

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<sup>1</sup>Church book of South Fork Church in the possession of Festus Havens, Malone, Kentucky.

<sup>2</sup>Spencer, J. H., A History of Kentucky Baptists, Vol. II, p. 286.

<sup>3</sup>Reprint of minutes of the Burning Spring Ass'n., 1837.

Paint Union Association of United Baptists was constituted the next year with seven churches. By 1843 it had grown to have fourteen churches and 632 members. This new association was not formed because of a difference in doctrine but simply for convenience. As the years passed, however, the two associations drew apart and finally became two separate sects. The Burning Spring Association became "hardshell" and the Paint Union remained "United." The latter has three churches in the county with about 180 members.<sup>1</sup> Another group of United Baptists operates in the county. They belong to the Mt. Zion Association and have three churches with 258 members.<sup>2</sup> Thus we find six United Baptist Churches in the county and 438 members.

Down through the last century the Burning Spring Association became hyper-Calvinistic and opposed to benevolent and missionary societies. They reasoned that such societies were not in the New Testament and if God wanted to convert the heathen he would do it without man's help. They became so reactionary that the name was changed from "United" to "Regular." Not all the members were agreed on their Calvinism, however, and split occurred in their association in 1894. The "liberals" pulled out and established the Enterprise Association of Regular Baptists with eight churches and 404 members. This group was nicknamed "Slabs" because they "slabbed off."<sup>3</sup> This

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<sup>1</sup>B. T. Morris of Caney, Ky., gave me those last figures.

<sup>2</sup>Minutes of Mt. Zion Ass'n. of United Baptists, 1940.

<sup>3</sup>The term "slab" came from the saw mill. It is the outside cut from a log in sawing it into boards, being convex on one side and usually bearing the bark. It was given in derision for slabs are thrown away or burned. In rebuttal the "Slabs" said that they were not slabs; that they cut deep and got the heart.

new group became aggressive and evangelistic and preached that Christ died for all men. They have grown faster than any of the other associations and today have fifty-seven churches with 3,872 members. Their fourteen churches with 1,450 members in Morgan County give them the honor of being the largest religious group in the county.

The Burning Spring Association continued to grow "harder" and became popularly known as "Hardshells." To show this in their name, they changed it again. Early in the 1920's they became "Regular Primitive Baptists." Today the association has fourteen churches with 749 members, eight of these with 430 members are in Morgan County.<sup>1</sup>

The confusion of the Baptists is further shown when we consider the next group--the Enterprise Association of Baptists. We have already discussed the Enterprise Association of Regular Baptists, but this is a different sect. This association is in fellowship with the Southern Baptist Convention. They desire to be called simply "Baptists" but are commonly known as "Missionary Baptists." In 1913 they established a church at West Liberty and the next year one at Pomp. They have grown but little and at present have only 121 members.<sup>2</sup> To my surprise, I learned that they are extremely strict, and in many regards "harder" than the "Hardshells."

To sum up the Baptists, we find four distinct brands. To accurately distinguish all the differences between them would take the wisdom of Solomon. They all have yearly associations and print the minutes of their meetings. Articles of faith and rules of decorum

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<sup>1</sup>Minutes of Burning Spring Ass'n. of Regular Primitive Baptists, 1939.

<sup>2</sup>Minutes of Enterprise Ass'n. of Baptists, 1940.

are included. Footwashing is practiced as an ordinance of the church by all except the Missionary and with them it is optional. The Primitives are the most Calvinistic. Articles 3 and 4a in their creed state,

We believe in the fall of Adam and the imputation of his sin to all posterity, the corruption of his nature and the total inability of man to recover himself, either in part or in whole. We believe in election according to the foreknowledge of God. . . .<sup>1</sup>

Contrasted with this, the Missionary, Regular, and United preach that Christ died for all men and that men are saved by grace through faith in Christ. On basic doctrines, the last three are not far apart, but association practices, denominational loyalties, and personal reasons keep them apart.

#### Methodist Churches

There is not much easily accessible data on the Methodist Church in Morgan County. It is not in my plan to go into it deeply, but I have found enough to answer my purpose in this thesis. In very early times circuit riders came through the county and formed classes. A few preachers lived in the county and preached at different places. As far as I discovered only four churches have been formed; West Liberty, Chapel, Cannel City, and Maytown. Some of the Methodist doctrines simply did not suit such a strong Baptist community. The democratic highlanders disliked their ecclesiastical hierarchy. The common-school-mountaineer read in the New Testament that baptism was a burial and he could not see how a man could be buried in a half pint of water.

The only church they have in the county today is at West

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<sup>1</sup>Minutes of Burning Spring Ass'n., 1939.

Liberty. Mr. Kenneth Clay, their pastor, is having a successful ministry. Maytown and Chapel Churches have ceased to exist and Cannel City is almost dead. Mr. Clay preaches for the latter once a month as a mission point. The total Methodist membership is about 120.<sup>1</sup>

### Holiness Groups

The Church of God (headquarters, Anderson, Indiana) established a church or two in the county thirty years ago. Several mission points were created and they spread their doctrine far and wide. These people were extreme radicals, not permitting their members to drink coffee, eat pork, raise or use tobacco. They wore no jewelry and their men even refrained from wearing ties. The use of cosmetics and the "bobbing" of the hair were horrible sins. "Saints" was the name they commonly wore. They have not grown very much and today have only two churches. They still stress holiness, but much of their radicalism has been discarded. Last summer I wanted to talk to one of their preachers, and where did I find him? Working in his tobacco patch! In the course of the conversation I asked him his position concerning tobacco. He replied, "You've got me there. I still think it is a nasty habit, but I don't say much about it and I raise it because it is about the only money crop I have."

Since these first Holiness, other groups have worked in the county. A few churches have been formed but the most of their preaching has been in school houses and homes. Even the churches established have often split up because of their hair-splitting interpretations of Scripture. Once each year they have an arbor meeting on Grassy Creek and large numbers attend, some to learn but the most to be entertained.

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<sup>1</sup>Statement by Kenneth Clay.

Concerning their doctrines, they stress the end of the world and the imminent return of Christ. Much of their preaching is about prophecy. They stress holiness of living; have the altar call, shout, testify and speak in tongues. The Church of God doctrines are similar. All these Holiness have many things in common, but every church and even every member in the church may stress different doctrines or have different interpretation upon doctrines they all accept. One group speaks in tongues, another does not. One believes in divine healing, another does not. One believes in the "second definite work of grace," another "gets it all at once." Endless confusion and contention is the result. The Baptist preacher had a good view of the situation when a Holiness preacher said to him, "Brother, do you mean to tell me that you chew tobacco and preach the gospel?" His apt reply was, "Yes, brother, and I notice that you chew the gospel and preach tobacco!"

On the whole, the Holiness are not strong in Morgan County. They make a lot more smoke than they produce fire. Many of their preachers are men of good reputation but some are not, and this hurts all of them. Their movement has damaged some of the other churches rather seriously, but the majority of their members had not been reached by the other churches or were among the disgruntled ones.

#### Presbyterian Churches

There is only one Presbyterian Church in Morgan County and it is a mission church working in conjunction with the mission school at Ezel. In the latter part of the last century there was a Presbyterian Church on Grassy Creek. It was called Bethsalem. In the 1880's

it joined with the Baptists and Church of Christ and helped construct the Salem church building. The Church of God movement did great damage to the Church of Christ at Salem; it also destroyed the Baptists and absorbed the Presbyterians. At the beginning of the twentieth century, some Presbyterians at Cannel City aided in constructing a union church building and for a few years had fourth-time preaching there. I do not know what branch or branches of the Presbyterians were at Salem and Cannel City, but the church at Ezel is a part of the United Presbyterian Church of North America.

The Church of Christ at Ezel was greatly damaged by Jack Howard and the Church of God.<sup>1</sup> After the episode, however, it regained some of its strength and continued to carry on in the manner common to the Churches of Christ in that vicinity. About all they had was quarter-time preaching and an occasional revival meeting. Fifteen miles west, at Frenchburg, the Presbyterians ran a mission school. Some of the citizens began to look at their own school which had only sixty pupils and lasted seven months, and to wish that they had a school like Frenchburg's. The result was that in the fall of 1923 they appealed to the Women's Board of the United Presbyterian Church for a school. The Women's Board sent two representatives to investigate conditions. They met with a local committee to talk over the situation. The Women's Board committee requested them to apply to the two denominations that were supposed to be worshipping there to build them a school. They added that if neither denomination would establish a school but would leave the territory to them, they would. Whereupon the community decided to deed the church property to the

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<sup>1</sup>Infra p. 58.



Presbyterians. The ownership of it was in confusion though, for the Church of God owned two-thirds of the land; the Church of Christ owned one-third and had constructed the building. Neither church had any trustees, so the community, including the majority of the members of both churches, elected two trustees--one from each church. Promptly they deeded the property to the Women's Board. The community donated ten more acres of land.

In March, 1924, a woman missionary was sent to Ezel. Soon she established a Sunday School, began holding prayer meetings, organized a Young People's Society, etc. The Presbyterian minister at Frenchburg came and assisted her. In a few months a congregation was organized with thirty-four members. As time went by, others were added. The old building was judged unfit for use, so it was torn down and a new one constructed and dedicated October 10, 1924.

The Presbyterians really put some life into that slumbering village. They made things happen. Naturally, they found some opposition and about twenty of the members of the Church of Christ would not give in. Being defeated, however, they could do little about it. What they did do was to continue meeting as a church group in the Greasy schoolhouse, two miles southeast. As the Presbyterians were getting their church firmly established they were planning for the school, which opened that fall and has served the community to the present. Practically all of the active opposition has died down and the village is very proud of having the school located there.

The mission work at Ezel includes both the church and the school. The enrollment at the school is about 250 and about 150 of these are in junior and senior high school. A deal was made with the

county concerning the lower three grades to give it "technical" supervision over them. It rents the rooms and pays the teachers. Actually, though, the Women's Board hires the teachers and determines the policy of the whole school. All of the twelve teachers are from the "outside" except the vocational teacher. The Bible has a prominent place in the curriculum. Attendance is not compulsory, but it is so attractive that almost all of the students delight in it. Through the continued help of the Presbyterians, fifty per cent of the high school graduates have gone to college. Several of these expect to return to the mountains and work among their own people. The teachers continue to serve by conducting Sunday Schools at three outlying places. In addition to the church building, a fine parsonage was constructed in 1932. It continues to be a mission church, however, for the Women's Board pays the salary of the minister and the janitor. The Sunday School has an enrollment of one hundred and an average attendance of about seventy. The membership of the church is 115 and in 1940 they gave \$1,190 to the church. Part of this went on the preacher's salary, part to local expense and some to missions.

In many of the rural churches the problem of "walking in and out" is a serious one. Often, large numbers of boys and young men gather at meeting not because they are interested, but simply to loaf around. In the middle of the service a dozen of them may walk in and sit down. Five minutes later they may get up and stroll out. The kindly but gruff old janitor at Ezel put a stop to this. He told them to either stay in or stay out. They loaf someplace else now.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>This data came from a letter from Mrs. W. S. Cook of Beaver

Missionaries

I have already discussed the major churches in Morgan County except the Church of Christ. I have not discussed the Roman Catholics, for there are only two or three families there. Another movement must be considered at this juncture. In the last few years several missionaries from up North have been coming into the county. Some of them belong to the Assemblies of God and some to the Kentucky Holiness Association but the majority are not Holiness. Several are from Moody Bible Institute and I think that this classification fits the most of them. They are not supported by any denomination but by individual churches and friends. This support is limited and some of them are extremely poor. Their work means real sacrifices. Their main stress is on teaching the young and not the establishment of churches. These missionaries conduct Sunday Schools and visit the public schools where they encourage Bible reading and memorization and give Testaments. They go all over the county, often on foot, and do what they can for the cause of Christ.

**Part II: THE HISTORY**

**Chapter 3: GROWTH OF CHURCHES  
OF CHRIST**

### Chapter 3: GROWTH OF CHURCHES OF CHRIST

The first denomination in Morgan County was the Baptists, who held sway for several years with no competition. They established their churches and association and carried on in the way common to the Baptists at the opening of the nineteenth century. The Restoration Movement, whose principal leader was Alexander Campbell, gained great strength in central Kentucky very early, but hardly reached into the mountains. Through his magazine, the "Christian-Baptist," and by his tours through the central part of the state, Mr. Campbell spread the doctrines advocating "the return to the ancient order of things." One of the Baptist preachers converted by him was Raccoon John Smith who proved to be one of the ablest exponents of New Testament Christianity in Kentucky. For years this man had labored under the dense cloud of Calvinism, but when shown the true light of the Gospel, he went forth zealously proclaiming the message. Many of the Baptists were won; large numbers of others were also brought to the new truth. In 1832 he made a preaching trip through Morgan County. The result was the establishment of the first Church of Christ in the county. It was at White Oak and had only eight members, but one of them was a Baptist preacher by the name of Joseph Nickell. Preacher Joe (as he came to be called) nurtured the new congregation and won more members to it. Appreciating simple New Testament Christianity, he went forth to share it with others and the following year established the second Church of Christ in the county at Old Grassy.

Now the beginning was humble indeed, but it proved to be a permanent one. One preacher and two small churches were endeavoring to hold up the light of the Restoration. This they stubbornly and

faithfully did, although the opposition to them was bitter. The most of it came from their former associates, the Baptists, and especially from the preachers. Evidence of this opposition is shown in the Minutes of the Burning Spring Association of United Baptists held in October, 1837. In the circular letter are written these words-- "we wish to thank the Giver of all good for his guardian care over us and especially when we hear of the dissensions in the Christian world, even amongst those of our own name. . . ." <sup>1</sup> The writers of that letter revealed undue modesty when they claimed to hear of dissensions. They were experiencing them.

In spite of opposition the Restoration Movement continued to grow. In 1839 "Preacher Joe" established the Blackwater Church near Ezel. The three pioneer churches of the county are White Oak, Old Grassy, and Ezel. While they were left to a great degree to carry on by themselves, they were conscious of being a part of the greatest religious movement of that century. They rejoiced in being associated with such forward thinkers as Alexander Campbell, John Smith, Barton W. Stone and John T. Johnson. They were part of the group arising to throw off sectarianism and returning to the fundamentals of the New Testament. Their aim was not to reform the Church. Luther, Calvin, and Wesley had tried that and failed. Their aim was to restore it as it was in Apostolic times. Superstitions, creeds, and man-made doctrines were to be discarded. They asked not that others join them but that all join Christ and thus be brothers.

While the Churches of Christ clung firmly to the local auto-

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<sup>1</sup> Reprint of Minutes of the Burning Spring Ass'n., 1837.

nomy of each church, they soon realized the necessity of working together for their mutual benefit. Consequently they began holding annual meetings for worship and fellowship. The main leader of this cooperative movement was Preacher Joe who served as the chairman for many years. After some time they created a district and called it the West Liberty Annual District.

The churches followed the pattern of the Baptists and had meeting one week end each month. Between times, meetings would be held at other places in school houses, in private homes, and groves. This custom of having monthly services is easily understood when we remember that the county was sparsely settled and that for many of the members a trip to meeting meant a long journey. Also roads were poor or non-existent, so it was quite a task to travel five or twenty miles to meeting. When one made such an effort, he wanted to hear more than a thirty minute sermon. Consequently, if three or four ministers were present, they all preached. The services often lasted three or four hours. The Lord's Supper was served each preaching day but not every Lord's Day.

For several years after the beginning of the Restoration Movement in the county the people from West Liberty had to go to White Oak to meeting. Occasionally, Preacher Joe or another minister would hold meeting in the court house. About 1850 Dr. Daniel Dillon, a practicing physician from Bath County, began holding a few meetings in West Liberty. He won many people to Christ and gathered up some members of the Church of Christ and in 1852 established a Church of Christ in the county seat.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Mr. Ruben Cassity, of West Liberty, supplied me with this information in March 1941. No definite records are extant, but

Kentucky being a border state, the Civil War caused immense damage to the churches within her boundary. In Morgan the church life was temporarily upset, but if it caused any permanent harm among the Churches of Christ I could not discover it. Not passing judgment as to the connection, three Churches of Christ were founded just after the close of the war. The Blairs Mills Church, in the northern tip of the county, was founded by Hiram Lee. The Toms Branch Church was established at the same time. Probably credit for this should go to Harry Little. At Salem a church was founded by Parris Robinett. Thus we have six scattered churches serving members all over the county. Data for this period is scarce, but from conversations with old people and a general background of the churches in the county, I wish to sum up the situation.

Not one of the six churches owned the building it used for meeting. The West Liberty Church did as the other religious bodies in the town, and met in the court house. The others met in school houses which they had helped construct. As meetings were about the only place to go, saint and sinner alike attended and the houses were usually full. It is doubtful if any of them had Sunday School except West Liberty. The Lord's Supper was usually observed when they met, which was once a month. None of the churches had resident salaried ministers. Rather, they had a system of "mutual ministry," although they did not give it that name. In almost every church there was an elder or two who would "talk in public." Some of them would preach in the home church or "say a few words" when visiting other meetings, and some of them held regular pastorates. The latter

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Mr. Cassity has spent the most of his 88 years in West Liberty and is in a position to know the facts.



meant that they had certain places to go once a month. Thus a man could serve four churches. He usually went on Saturday and preached in the morning or afternoon and maybe at night. He held another service Sunday morning. Visiting and local preachers were always asked to say a few words. The successful meetings were often "pretty warm." The preacher would close his sermon with a hearty exhortation to the Christians to be faithful and an urgent invitation to the sinners to accept Christ and be saved. Then an invitation hymn would be sung and before its conclusion, general handshaking would begin. The faithful would start it by shaking hands with everyone. A sister might shout for a while and finally the benediction would be pronounced. For his services the minister seldom received any remuneration at all. In fact, he did not expect any, for he had his own farm or business to furnish him a living, which was usually a little better than that of the other members. The ministers were well-read in the Scriptures but without any formal ministerial education.

The Annual Meetings were always delightful times. From one year to another the people eagerly looked forward to them. They began on Friday before the third Sunday in September and lasted over Sunday. Each church sent delegates (no definite number) and a letter reporting the condition of the church. No definite rules of decorum were formulated as they were in the Baptist Associations. Business was conducted but voting was not limited to the delegates. Any member who happened to be present voted. The only Annual officers elected for the coming year were the chairman and clerk. The only feature on the program planned ahead of time was the preacher to bring the "Introductory Sermon" on Saturday morning. The rest of the program was arranged after they assembled.

The meeting was primarily religious but at the same time it answered a social need. While the more pious ones never missed a sermon, hundreds came only to see their friends and never heard one word the preachers said. The community having the Annual was host to all who saw fit to come and this number often reached the thousands. The Sunday meal was served in a grove near the church. The other meals were served in the homes. The bedding capacity was greatly taxed and all kinds of improvised beds were used. It was not at all uncommon for a family to entertain from twenty to forty people.

Another interesting part of the Annual was the "jockey ground," usually a mile or so from the church. It was not an integral part but custom established it to go along with the Annual. The swapping of horses and mules continued on Friday and Saturday but was discontinued on Sunday. All kinds of horses and mules could be seen and a man with one in any condition could get a trade. Everyone trusted his own judgment and if an animal failed to meet his expectations he had no one to blame but himself.

At the beginning of the 1880's the condition of the Church of Christ was an enviable one. They had seven thriving churches that answered the needs of the communities in which they were located. Their membership was the largest of any communion in the county. Their preachers included W. L. Lacy, Harry Little and W. C. Nickell who were men of high standing in their communities and able preachers of the Gospel. It was also during this decade that outside help began pouring into the county. In 1883 David Garrett Combs moved from Owlsley County to Ezel and there established a large mill--a combination grist mill, carding factory and saw mill. In this enterprise he had the help of some local men. Mr. Combs had been a capable

evangelist for several years and in the new county, he continued his labors in the ministry in addition to his work in the mill. He became pastor of the Ezel Church, known in that day as the Blackwater Church, located one mile southeast of the village of Ezel. The church had been meeting in a school house, so Mr. Combs persuaded them to move the church to Ezel and construct a fine frame church building. This evangelist extended his labors to other parts of the county and in 1886 established the Colosse Church on Williams Creek. John Bays assisted him in this work.

For many years Christian and Baptist preachers had preached in the Shoal Branch school house near the Magoffin County line. Several members of the Church of Christ lived near there, so they constituted a church and built the Bethany Church house near the mouth of Rockhouse Creek. Evangelist W. L. Lacy dedicated it about 1836.

Up until this time the churches had met in school houses but now they are constructing their own building. Blairs Mills, Toms Branch and Williams Creek continued to meet in school houses. I have already mentioned the building of church houses at Ezel and Bethany. In 1877 White Oak had left the school house to worship in its own building. During the 1880's West Liberty Church constructed a building, the first in the village. In 1887 the Salem Church joined with the Baptists and Presbyterians and constructed a large frame structure. Thus we see that this might properly be called a building decade for the churches.

All of the progress was not material, however, because it was at the same period that different agencies of the Churches of Christ began to show lively interest in the development of education

in the backward mountain counties. Several academies were founded, including one at Hazel Green. This institution is not in Morgan, but Wolfe County, but being only one mile from the line, a word about it should be included. It was founded in 1880 as a community enterprise and in 1886 the Christian Women's Board of Missions of Kentucky gained partial control over it. In 1888 it passed into the hands of the national organization of the Christian Women's Board of Missions. When Hazel Green Academy was established it was the only institution of higher learning in a large area. Consequently hundreds of intelligent boys and girls, men and women, flocked to it to take advantage of the educational opportunities at its disposal. They went out to become teachers, lawyers, doctors, etc. to bless the mountains because of the academy.

At the same time the Kentucky Christian Missionary Society began to awaken to the needs of evangelism in the mountain counties. It had shown some interest before this time, but through the labors of J. M. Downing the interest was greatly accelerated. This man was well educated and had such a knowledge of the conditions in the mountains that he was in the position to do the needed work. The Society employed him as Eastern Kentucky Evangelist. He moved to West Liberty and from there directed the work. His plan was not to import Christian workers, but to train those on the field and recruit others. Here are his own words as presented to the Kentucky Christian Missionary Convention in 1889,

One of our greatest needs of our work in Eastern Kentucky is church training. Instead of an evangelist going to a church with the determination to have forty or fifty additions to the congregation, let him go with the determination to get that church into Apostolic order before he leaves it. The elders should be committed to the faithful discharge of their duties,

especially in regard to the weekly assembling of the church. The members should be induced to participate in the exercises of the occasion, and thus gradually work all the material in that church into the worship. A dozen churches set in order this way will tell more for the permanence and prosperity of the cause in every sense than to baptize and bring into dead churches, as into spiritual graveyards, 500 souls.

The outlook of our work is full of promise. There will be room for plenty of patient, hard work. We want to build upon a strong, broad foundation. The mushroom grows up in a night and perishes in a day. The kingly oak of the forest is of slow growth. The success of the last two years, with the consequent bright prospects for the future furnishes ample encouragement for noble efforts in the coming year.<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Downing went all through the mountains doing the work he planned. He organized new districts, established churches and trained leaders. Through his help Professor J. W. McGarvey was brought to West Liberty to hold a Preacher's Institute. This was such a success that he was called back to hold another. The State Society had a budget of \$12,000 but only \$1,000 was allocated to the work in eastern Kentucky. This was used to pay Mr. Downing's salary and to supplement the salary of local evangelists. The amount paid these men, selected by the local Annuals, was small but it was greatly appreciated, especially when we remember that they usually received nothing for their services.

The churches began to grow, the local preachers began to show a keener interest in spreading the Word, the State Society was interested. But alas! A wrench was thrown into the cogs. About 1890 a young man by the name of Jack Howard came from Magoffin into Morgan County. He preached in several Churches of Christ and was well received. Bro. Downing took an interest in him and began to make plans to get him into the College of the Bible at Lexington. After some

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<sup>1</sup>Minutes of the Kentucky Christian Missionary Convention held at Versailles, August, 1889. The report submitted by Mr. Downing was read by the State Evangelist, E. F. Clay.

time, however, Mr. Howard began preaching that the name of the church was not Church of Christ (as our ministers called it), but Church of God. His other doctrines were those commonly held by our preachers, but his insistence on this point caused dissention. He was a dynamic orator and wherever he preached won adherents to his views. The other ministers resented his position. Mr. Downing dropped his plan to get him into the College of the Bible. This further inflamed Howard who went abroad preaching the Church of God and creating "Howardites." He began establishing Churches of God and even spread into neighboring counties sowing discord and establishing churches. Not alone did he harm our churches because he drew large numbers from the others as well.

At the first, our ministers were reluctant to debate Howard, not desiring to stir up more trouble, but finally W. C. Nickell accepted his challenge. They were to have a three day debate in the Salem Church. Mr. Nickell was not such an orator as Howard but he was the strongest doctrinal preacher we had in the county. The debate was a bitter affair but Howard met his match. After one day Howard quit the debate, contending that "Uncle Cebe" was too hard on him. From this we might conclude that Mr. Nickell won the debate, but as is usually the result in such affairs, neither man won and neither changed his position. It did serve to increase the bitterness and draw tighter the lines of distinction.

After this Howard went on preaching and establishing churches. At Salem he organized a Church of God which continued to meet in the same building used by the Church of Christ. At Exel he did the same thing. In some of the other churches his influence was noticeable but not sufficient to establish separate churches. Two years after

the debate Mr. Howard died, at the early age of twenty-eight years.

Being this far removed from this episode what is our judgment about it? I have talked to Howardite preachers (two or three are still living), to Uncle Cebe and many others about it. At Howard's death they had about a dozen churches in Morgan and neighboring counties. They held their own Annual Meetings. Some of our preachers went off with the movement and many members who remained in the Church of Christ sympathized with it. Mr. Howard was utterly sincere in his doctrines, but this consideration alone did not lead him to establish separate churches. He was the type of fellow who wanted to be the "big mogul" in his group. This he could not be in the Church of Christ. Downing was it. Although he may not have been conscious of it, this aided in causing him to do what he did. When we consider the question of the name, obviously both sides were in error and in times of stress were led to make unwarranted assumptions. Certainly Scriptural arguments can be found for both names and neither should have objected if the other party preferred a different one. I am forced to brand the whole Howardite Movement as a tragedy and as doing immense damage to the Restoration Movement in Morgan County. After Mr. Howard's death the Church of God started down hill and today is practically non-existent.

The last decade of the last century not alone witnessed the debacle of the Howardite Movement but it saw the decrease of the interest of the State Missionary Society in the county. Mr. D. G. Combs left the saw mill to his family and partners, and began full-time evangelism. Due to ill health, in 1894 Mr. Downing gave up his position as Eastern Kentucky Evangelist and left the mountains. His plans had been admirable ones and he saw them bearing fruit, but six

or seven years was not sufficient time to firmly establish them. The State Society continued to supplement the salary of the evangelist selected by the Annual but this did not compensate for the loss of Combs and Downing. Of course, the Society was not interested in Morgan County alone. Its mountain work included all the mountain counties and in 1900 Mr. H. W. Elliot, the State Evangelist, said, "We are, perhaps, stronger in Morgan than any other mountain county."<sup>1</sup> Consequently their interest was lessened in Morgan but increased in other counties of eastern Kentucky.

This same decade witnessed the founding of another church. At Bethany the congregation got into a church fight over the school election. It seems that the defeated teacher wanted to use the church building in which to teach a private school. Some of the members objected, and they got into such a fight that several pulled out, went over on Lacy Creek and established the "New Hope" Church. After a few years the bitterness died down and some of them went back to Bethany. New Hope was serving a needy community, however, so it continued to carry on.

The beginning of the twentieth century witnessed the formation of three new churches in Morgan County. In 1900 Evangelist W. L. Lacy moved to Adele, near the Wolfe County line. Finding no church but a few members he proceeded to organize a congregation. It came under his personal observation and he preached there when he could find time. The church made some growth but they never constructed a building. The schoolhouse served as a meeting place.

As mentioned in the first chapter, it was at this time that

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<sup>1</sup> Minutes of Kentucky Christian Missionary Convention, 1900.



a coal mine began operations at Cannel City and that a Union Church house was built. Members of the Church of Christ shared in the new building and used it for preaching one Sunday each month. Consequently they proceeded to establish a church. At Wrigley, a similar thing happened. The coming of the railroad brought many members of the Church of Christ into the new village. One of these, Sanford Adkins, was a preacher, so he gathered the members and organized a church. They met in the schoolhouse and had regular monthly meetings.

By this time the West Liberty Church had grown to have over two hundred members. The congregation had a good Sunday School and served communion each Lord's Day. They usually had half-time preaching but sometimes a resident full-time minister. In 1906 Evangelist W. J. Cooke held a revival in West Liberty. His doctrines did not please the Methodists. A very disagreeable feeling arose in the community. The two groups decided to call in prominent men and have a debate. The Methodists called Jacob Dietzler, a well-known debater and "Campbell-Killer." The Church of Christ sent for W. H. Book. The five-day debate was to be on the subject, "Action, Design and Subjects for Baptism." Lively interest was shown and the debate was well attended. Evidently Mr. Book won the debate because the Methodist pastor was removed. This debate stimulated the Church of Christ because they soon began work on a new brick veneer building. It was completed and dedicated in 1910, during the ministry of J. W. Hatcher.<sup>1</sup> This new building left the church in debt but they went to work to pay it off. The State Missionary Society extended some assistance.

At that time we had thirteen churches in the county. They

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<sup>1</sup>Letter from W. H. Book, July 12, 1940.

were all doing reasonably well for rural churches. The "Church of God" was still a problem at Salem and Ezel. In 1906 R. B. Neal went to the latter and reorganized the church.<sup>1</sup> Four of the congregations owned their own buildings, five met in Union houses and four in school houses. With the exception of West Liberty they all had fourth-time preaching and usually celebrated the Lord's Supper on their preaching days. West Liberty had a regular Sunday School and so did a few of the others but it was only spasmodic. It usually ceased operation in the winter time.

As I have already shown in the first chapter, the last quarter of a century has produced important changes in the social and economic life of Morgan County. Our investigation leads us now to consider the Church of Christ in the same period. Just after the World War the stream of emigrants from Morgan County rapidly expanded. This took members from every church in the county and consequently the churches suffered. In numerous cases the leading members were among those who left. In such instances the churches were left without adequate local leadership.

The decade from 1920 to 1930 saw the decline of the lumber and coal industries that outside capitalists had fostered in the county. As this happened, the people in the mushroom villages had to go back to their farms or their relatives or leave the county to obtain work in other places. Regardless of where they went, they left the villages. At Cannel City and Wrigley this resulted in the gradual decline and ultimate death of the Churches of Christ. Other factors played a part, of course, but this was the main reason that

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<sup>1</sup>Minutes of Kentucky Christian Missionary Convention, 1906.

the churches ceased to exist. The Adele Church suffered in a similar way but probably the old age and consequent inability of Evangelist W. L. Lacy to labor for the church was the primary reason that it, too, ceased to function. The few members of the churches that were left in these communities drifted into other churches or still profess to be members of the Church of Christ though they do not have a local congregation in which they may worship.

During this period one new church has been established. It was at Licking River in 1926 with twenty-six members.<sup>1</sup> They had quarter-time preaching for five years. After that the preaching was only "occasional" but a local man kept the Sunday School going until he died in 1935. In reality, the church never was very strong. It worked out to be a "preaching place" and when the preachers ceased going to preach the church naturally began to drift, and ultimately died.

The last quarter of a century has seen the other churches attempting to carry on in their customary way. West Liberty has usually had half-time preaching but Sunday School and communion every Sunday. The other churches have tried to have quarter-time preaching but some of them have not been so successful part of the time. The most of them have attempted to have Sunday Schools but have succeeded only part of the time. Concerning the Lord's Supper, their ideal is to have it every preaching day, but only in some instances does the ideal materialize. Some churches go two or three years without ever observing the Lord's Supper.

At present we have approximately 650 members in Morgan County.

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<sup>1</sup>Minutes of Annual Meeting, 1928, in possession of Mrs. Ova Maxey, Elamton, Ky., clerk.

The churches pay their ministers from nothing to \$12.50 each preaching day. Only three or four Sunday Schools are conducted by our people. The activities of the churches vary from the West Liberty Church, which has regular Sunday School and communion and half-time preaching (two Sunday mornings), to the Blackwater Church (Greasy School house), whose only church activity is preaching service the afternoon of the third Sunday in each month!

The local ministers in our churches are all farmers, except Harlen Murphy, who sells funeral supplies and occupies a minor public office. Immense respect and praise must go to these men. They have had to work for a living, but have given a considerable amount of their time to the ministry with little remuneration. Maybe during a busy season on the farm one of the preachers will be called to go fifteen miles to preach a funeral, and receive nothing for it except the gratitude of the bereaved. While giving due praise to these unsung heroes of faith, we must also face the fact that we have a scarcity of able preachers in Morgan County. Even the number is much smaller than it was a few years ago. Younger preachers are not being trained. Some Morgan County boys have recently become preachers but they are not in the county. We have only one young preacher in the county and he is about thirty years old. The oldest is eighty-six and only two are below sixty.

As we see, the ministers of the Church of Christ in the county are old men, and old men do not change their methods very readily. In fact, the average preaching service (the principal church activity) is very similar to a preaching service fifty or seventy-five years ago.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Supra p. 33,34.

For the Sunday morning service the meeting is supposed to begin about 10:30 or 11 A.M. but often begins "when the crowd gets there." The people come in cars, on horseback and on foot. As they gather in from across the hills and down the hollows, the women and children go into the house, and, if the weather permits, the men congregate outside to chew, smoke and gossip. Finally the time to begin arrives and the men come drifting in. The choir leader calls the choir to the front. Four or forty people may respond. Some churches have song books but others trust each singer to bring his own. This may result in three or four kinds of books. Some churches have an arranged program but others build it as they go along. The songs may be selected by the leader or preacher or the members of the choir. Some churches boast of having good choirs but others cannot get enough interest to have them. When the choir is ready to commence singing the leader gets his pitch from the tuning fork and then they begin--here and there a few from the congregation may join in but on the whole, the singing is left up to the choir. Some of the churches have instruments in the church and some do not.<sup>1</sup> During my visit to the churches in June, 1940, I heard some marvelous singing; I also heard some that was marvelously bad. I remember one church that had a choir of eight or ten women and girls. The leader began the first verse too high but they screamed through until they came to a high place in the chorus and one by one they dropped out. Another person began the second verse but she started it too low and the result was about the same.

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<sup>1</sup>This is not because of doctrinal reasons. Some members do not like the idea of having instrumental music, but the question has really never disturbed the county, and for this we can be extremely thankful.

To continue with a description of the service--after three or four songs the preacher calls on someone to pray. Usually the pious ones kneel and the others remain seated. Another song follows, and then the preacher asks some visiting brother or "talking elder" to "introduce." This consists of reading a passage of Scripture and talking ten or thirty minutes. Due to the scarcity of preachers it often happens that the minister is the only preacher present so he has to introduce the service himself. Following the introduction, the minister delivers the main message which may be twenty minutes or an hour. As he concludes, if he knows that some other preacher (even a member of some other communion) is present, as an act of courtesy he invites him to "say a few words." If the service has already lasted a considerable time he may refuse, but often he arises and delivers another sermon. Finally the preaching (one sermon or three or four) will be over and an invitation hymn will be sung. Then the congregation will be dismissed. Sometimes a "handshaking" will precede the dismissal.

When this service is compared with the service of fifty years ago we find the main items are almost identical. The songs may be selected ahead of time or they may not be. Courtesy demands that all "visiting brethren" be asked to talk. While the Lord's Supper is seldom observed today, then it was a regular item on the program for the Sunday morning service. The service is extremely informal; the exacting formality often found in city churches would not be appreciated. In fact, the most of the people could not understand it, and even if they could they would not feel comfortable in it. It seems that this general informality has some bearing on their lethargy regarding the Lord's Supper. The majority of the

people have no idea of the church building as a "sacred house." They formerly met in the school house which served as a place of worship and community center. When the churches were constructed they still remained "meeting houses." Even in some of the churches the men chew tobacco and expectorate upon the floor during the meeting! An exception to most of these things, of course, must be made for the West Liberty Church which has a program similar to that of half-time churches throughout the brotherhood.

For about a century the center attraction of the churches has been the Annual Meeting held the week end of the third Sunday in September. It, too, is conducted in the same general way as it always has been.<sup>1</sup> Each church sends delegates (no definite number but usually one or two) and a letter reporting the condition of the church. The delegates assemble Friday afternoon to conduct the necessary business. The voting, however, is not limited to the delegates as in the Baptist Associations, any member who happens to be present uses his right of franchise. The business sessions produce a lot of talking and suggestions to help the churches but usually little is actually accomplished. The only Annual officers elected for the next year are the clerk and chairman. The only part of the program planned ahead of time is the "Introductory Sermon" for Saturday morning. At the first session of the Annual a program committee is appointed. As soon as they are appointed, they leave the house and decide who is to pray, introduce and deliver the sermon at the next session. They return to the meeting and submit the report. In each following session they announce the program for the next session. Some of the business

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<sup>1</sup> Supra p. 34, 35.

is carried over to Saturday. On the whole, the Annual Meeting is a preaching meeting.

While the Annual is primarily religious it still answers a social need. At the Annual Meeting at Salem, September, 1940, the attendance on Friday and Saturday was small but swelled to 1500 on Sunday. About 350 of these people packed the house or looked through the windows during the service, but the remainder did not hear a thing that was said in the meeting. While "the faithful" try not to miss a service the majority of the people attend to see their relatives and friends. Large numbers of people who have left the county return for the Annuals. The community having the meeting serves as host to all who desire to come. While large numbers take advantage of the invitation, good roads and cars have eased much of the burden from the immediate neighborhood. Yet, the community still feeds and houses large numbers. Sunday dinner is served "on the ground" at the church.

Like the old gray mare, the "jockey ground" "ain't what she used to be." It still goes along with the Annual, but cars and roads have doomed it to an insignificant place. Last September only a few horses and mules were traded.<sup>1</sup>

The present time finds the Churches of Christ in Morgan County to be the second largest religious group in the county. The 1,450 Enterprise Regular Baptists are the largest; we are next with 650 members. Fifty years ago we were the largest, and, while five churches have been established in that time, four of them have died. Even those churches remaining are relatively weaker. While our members are

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<sup>1</sup>The description of the Annual comes from my attendance of them.



"strong on doctrine" (especially in speech) they "fellowship" with any group that will fellowship with them. In West Liberty the Church of Christ and Methodist Church work in harmony. The local Missionary Baptists will have nothing to do with them, however. Through the county, our churches have little relationship with the Primitive Baptists, Holiness groups, Presbyterians and United Baptists, but they and the "Slab" Baptists get along very well. Often their ministers preach together. Although there is some friction, on the whole, the "Slabs" and "Campbellites" work together in peace and harmony.

The Churches of Christ have little contact with the Kentucky Christian Missionary Society or any national agencies of the brotherhood. The only benevolent or missionary work that I discovered was the \$100 given by the women of the West Liberty Church. They also took a few copies of the World Call. Less than half a dozen copies of either Christian Standard or Christian Evangelist go into the county. Hazel Green Academy (under the auspices of the United Christian Missionary Society) has dwindled from the status of academy to that of a local high school with less than a hundred students. The teachers used to preach in several Morgan County churches but they do not do that any more. The Churches of Christ in Morgan County carry on in their own way with practically no connection with the brotherhood as a whole. The only "convention" they have anything to do with is the local West Liberty Annual District Meeting.

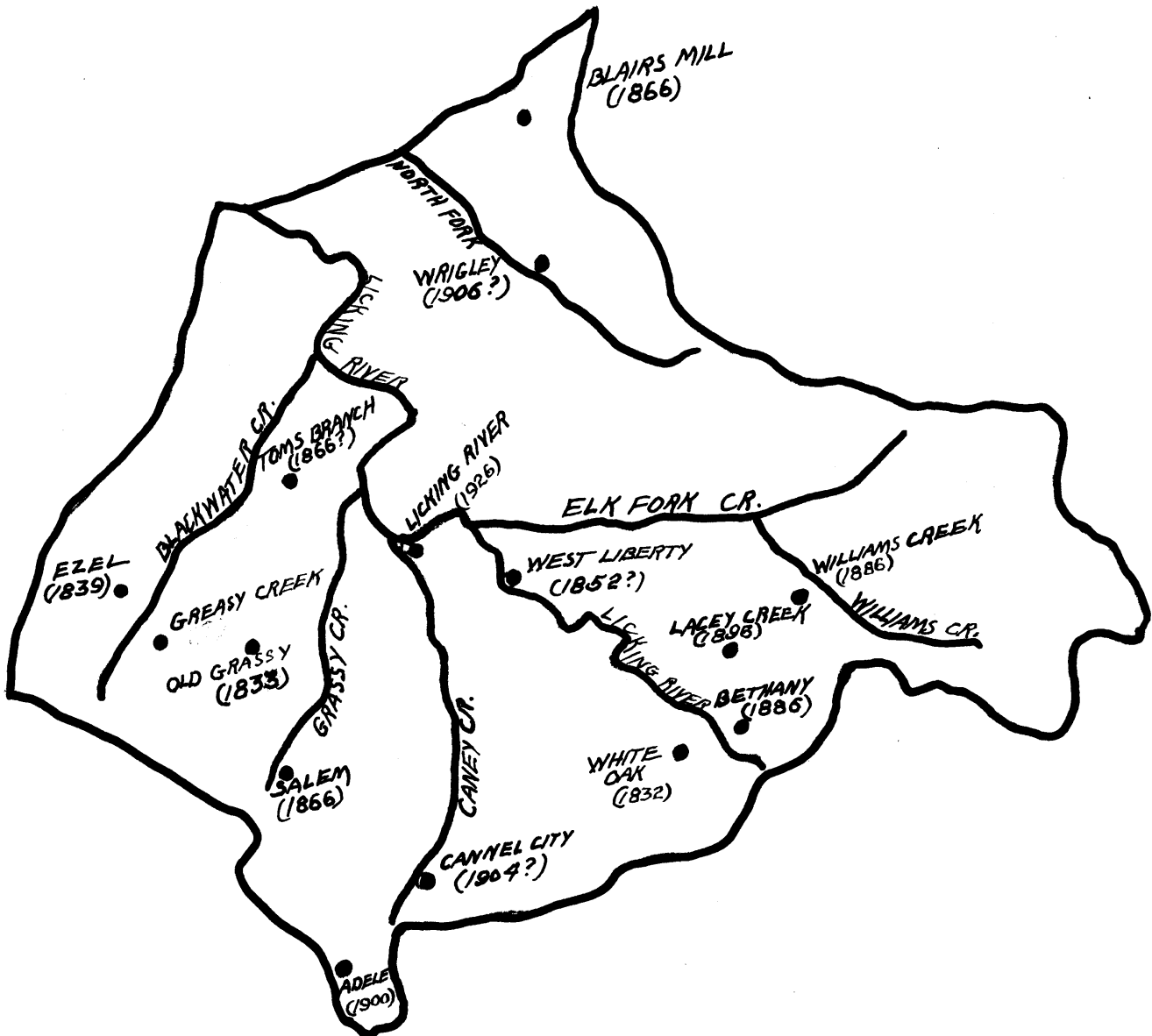
**Part III: ITEMIZATION**

**Chapter 4: LOCAL HISTORIES**

**Chapter 5: BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES  
OF PREACHERS**

# MORGAN COUNTY

Showing the Location  
of the Churches of Christ



## Chapter 4: LOCAL HISTORIES

### White Oak Church

State of Kentucky, Morgan County  
The Christian Church at White Oak in  
the county and state aforesaid was  
constituted on the 27th of November 1832,  
on the New Testament, believing the  
Old and New Testaments to be the  
infallible work of God,  
Taking the New Testament for the only  
rule of faith and practice and will  
endeavor to practice the same, and  
agree to keep a record of the church  
proceedings,

Said church was constituted by eight  
members as follows,

Joseph Nickell  
Rachel Nickell (his wife)  
William Prather, Sr.  
Nancy Prather (his wife)  
John Hammon  
Isaac Nickell  
Isabell Nickell (his wife)  
Pollie Clemmons<sup>1</sup>

This is the record of the establishment of the first Church  
of Christ in Morgan County. The name of the founder is not given  
but at the Centennial in 1932 the common opinion was that "Raccoon"  
John Smith was the founder. The agreement to keep a record of church  
proceedings was surely slighted. The extant records are very limited.  
For a year we may find a complete report but a blank for the next ten.  
From the records available and from talking to many of the members, I  
have pieced together a brief history.

The young church made slow but steady progress. One of the  
charter members, Joseph Nickell, had been a Baptist preacher. He  
took the oversight and nourished the new congregation. Soon his uncle,  
Isaac Nickell, gave a plot of ground upon which a church house was to

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<sup>1</sup>Old church book (which I found inside the pulpit) dated May 15,  
1875, copied from a previous record by R. C. Maxey, clerk.

be built.<sup>1</sup> The citizens gathered and at a big "log raising" the house was constructed. It served the purpose of both church and school. Mrs. Francis Elam (born 1858) described the old building to me and said that her father went to school there when he was a boy. It was made of large hewn logs and daubed with mud. It had no windows, but holes with shutters let in the light. A large open fireplace, large enough to hold logs ten feet long, heated the house. The seats were split logs with pegs in them.<sup>2</sup>

For twenty years this was the only Church of Christ in a wide area. It had members as far down the Licking River as West Liberty; and as far up the river as Salyersville. People came from Elk Fork and Caney Creek to its meetings.

This old church grew to be one of our strongest churches in the county. Its custom has been to have preaching on the first Sunday in each month. Seldom has it been without a pastor. In 1875 it reported sixty-two members in good standing.<sup>3</sup> By that time the old building was badly in need of repair. In fact, they conceded that it was beyond repair. Whereupon they tore it down and constructed a 24 feet by 40 feet frame building. About that time a Sunday School was started. In 1892 it had forty-seven students enrolled.<sup>4</sup>

The establishing of new churches hurt the parent congregation. In only two instances, however, does the church book give evidence of this. It recorded the fact that six members went to

<sup>1</sup>Nickell, Joe, History of Nickell Family.

<sup>2</sup>Statements by Mrs. Francis Elam, White Oak, Ky., June, 1940.

<sup>3</sup>Old church book.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

Bethany and four to New Hope. In the 1890's three members went to Texas and three to the Indian Territory. I am confident that many more who are not mentioned also left White Oak. These folk included some of their most substantial members. Naturally, it weakened the church.

The church book states that in June, 1919, there were forty-two members in full fellowship.<sup>1</sup> They made some progress the next few years. In 1924 they reported seventy-five members to the Annual.<sup>2</sup> About this time a Christian Endeavor was started but it lasted only a short time. By 1929 the membership had dropped to fifty. It has remained at that level to the present.

In 1932 the congregation spent about \$75 to repair the building in preparation for the Centennial celebration, which was held in conjunction with the Annual Meeting.<sup>3</sup> Today the house is in good repair, well painted inside and outside. They have electric lights and a piano. The Sunday School functions part of the time. Harlen Murphy, who lives at West Liberty, preaches for them one Sunday each month. For his services last year he received \$35.

#### Old Grassy Church

The Christian Church at Old Grassy Creek, Morgan County, Kentucky was congregated in the year of our Lord October 26, 1833.<sup>4</sup>

The above statement is all that we have concerning the estab-

<sup>1</sup>Present church book in possession of Lula Elam, clerk.

<sup>2</sup>Minutes of Annual Meeting, 1924.

<sup>3</sup>Present church book.

<sup>4</sup>In church book, copied from former one in 1877 by James A. Oldfield, clerk, in possession of Kelly Nickell, Mize, Ky., present clerk.

lishment of the second Church of Christ in Morgan County. Several of the old members think that Preacher Joe Nickell was the founder. My knowledge of its early history is extremely limited but I suppose that it carried on in the way common to our churches in the county at that time. It had quarter-time preaching and an occasional revival meeting. Very early they constructed a large log church house on the hill opposite Kelly Nickell's home. Just after the Civil War they moved a quarter of a mile up the creek, and built another log house. This served as a meeting place until they built the present frame structure in 1897.<sup>1</sup> The membership of the church at that time was sixty-eight.<sup>2</sup>

I have already mentioned the fact that large numbers of people have left Morgan County. This church was seriously damaged by this. Several of their most loyal members moved away. Other loyal members have grown old and died. Young ones have not been trained to take their places. A few years ago some Holiness people came into the community. They wanted to hold a revival in the church but could not get the permission of the elders. Consequently, they went up the creek a short distance and preached in an old school house. Later they began holding annual arbor meetings which lasted several weeks. They do not have an organized church; yet, they have taken some of the best members of the Church of Christ. Also, a considerable number in the community who do not belong to their group sympathize with them.

Here, then, we find another "used-to-be" strong church that

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<sup>1</sup>These facts given by Kelly Nickell.

<sup>2</sup>Church book.

is marking time today. They have a membership of sixty-five but only twenty to twenty-five attend preaching services. They have no Sunday School and communion only three or four times a year. Harlen Murphy preaches quarter-time for them and three of the members give him about \$6 each trip.

The members do not have to worry about keeping the building in repair. About ten years ago, W. T. Caskey of Neosho, Missouri, (formerly of Morgan County) willed \$500.00 in bank stock to the church to maintain the building. This is a sufficient amount because it earns about \$25 each year.<sup>1</sup>

#### Blackwater (Ezel) Church

Loren Nickell, a grandson of Preacher Joe Nickell, says that the Blackwater Church was established about 1839 by his grandfather. Preacher Joe lived near the church and through his labors in it the congregation grew to be a strong church. They helped construct a log school house which served for both church and school. It was approximately one mile southeast of Ezel, close to Blackwater Creek.<sup>2</sup> They had big crowds at their meetings. Preacher Joe and Harry Little were their favorite preachers. "Stringer Bill" Yocum (six feet, six inches tall) lived near there and often he preached for the church.

In 1883 Mr. D. G. Combs moved to Ezel and began preaching for the congregation. Before long he persuaded the people to move the church to Ezel and construct a new building. This they did and the building was above the average for Morgan County churches. Many folk

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<sup>1</sup>Kelly Nickell supplied the most of these facts about the Old Grassy Church.

<sup>2</sup>Statement by Mrs. Mary E. McGuire (b. 1857), Ezel, Ky., Mar., 1941.



still remember the clear-toned bell, especially when it was tolled when there was a funeral. One man told me that he could hear it at his home (seven miles away) in favorable weather. Under Mr. Combs' supervision the church grew but about 1890 he became an evangelist for the Kentucky Christian Missionary Society and from then on had only limited time to give to Ezel.<sup>1</sup>

Just about this time Jack Howard moved to Ezel, and split the church wide open. He established a Church of God which shared the building with the Church of Christ. The building still had a \$500 debt on it. The man who loaned the money sued the church and got judgment. Part of it was paid and then he deeded two-thirds of the church property to the Church of God and one-third to the Church of Christ. Before long lightning struck the building and burned it. Then the Church of Christ built a less pretentious structure on the original foundation. This placed the problem of ownership in confusion. Anyway, both churches held preaching services in the building.<sup>2</sup>

Jack Howard did irreparable damage to the Ezel Church of Christ. It never regained its former strength. Mr. R. B. Neal's efforts of reorganization in 1906 did not greatly alter the situation.<sup>3</sup> But, it continued to carry on and have its regular quarter-time preaching.

In 1924 the United Presbyterians came to Ezel and gained possession of the church property.<sup>4</sup> They established a church and a

<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Statement by Loren Nickell, Mize, Ky., June, 1940.

<sup>3</sup>Minutes of Kentucky Christian Missionary Convention, 1906.

<sup>4</sup>Supra pp. 24-27

school. The Church of God members went into the Presbyterian Church. The majority of the Church of Christ members did likewise. About twenty of them refused to submit, though. They went two miles south-east to the Greasy Creek schoolhouse and continued to have meetings. They have made some gains in membership since then. At present they have thirty-eight members.<sup>1</sup> They used to have Sunday School, but it ceased to exist about three years ago. Seldom do they observe the Lord's Supper. When Harlen Murphy preaches at Old Grassy on the third Sunday of each month, he drives on over to Greasy school house and preaches in the afternoon. Their church consists of having preaching service once each month and fifty may attend or only five!

#### West Liberty Church

West Liberty has been the county seat of Morgan County since the founding of the county in 1823. The other communities in the county used combination church-school houses for places of worship. West Liberty found an easier way and used the court house. Different denominations preached in it but none of them organized a church until some time later. One of the early Christian preachers was Joseph Nickell. About 1850 a practicing physician and "fighting Campbellite," Daniel Dillon, came to West Liberty and held some meetings. Here he found several members of the Church of Christ but no organized church. After converting some more he proceeded to organize a church. Uncle Rube Cassity (born 1853) says that this was in 1852 or 1853.

A union Sunday School was conducted in the court house. Different religious groups continued to have preaching days. In 1884 the Church of Christ ventured into a new plan for the village. Through

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<sup>1</sup>Minutes of Annual Meeting, 1940.

the encouragement of J. M. Downing it constructed a good-sized frame building upon a lot donated by Mr. and Mrs. H. C. Turner.<sup>1</sup> Mr. Downing lived at West Liberty several years and although his duties as Eastern Kentucky Evangelist took him all over the mountains, the West Liberty Church received a good share of his attention.

Jack Howard became pastor of the church, but fortunately did not get to destroy it. He began preaching his Church of God doctrine at Salem and some of the elders from West Liberty happened to be present. When they returned home, they talked the matter over and then wrote to Howard telling him not to return to the West Liberty Church.<sup>2</sup>

The church book states that in 1893 the church was reorganized and the book revised. At that time they had about 175 members.<sup>3</sup>

During the ministry of J. W. Hatcher the old building was torn down and a new brick veneer building constructed. This was in 1910. It had colored glass windows and the total cost was about \$6,000. The minutes of the Kentucky Christian Missionary Convention for the same year say, "We agreed to pay \$200 toward the support of J. Wesley Hatcher in this, the county seat of Morgan County. A splendid new house of worship, probably the best we have in Central Eastern Kentucky has been erected." The minutes for the next year state that West Liberty had received some support for Mr. Hatcher, who had been forced by ill health to resign. Soon the church called Mr. J. T. McGarvey, principal of Hazel Green Academy, to be half-time preacher. The burden of the church debt caused the church to appeal to the Society for more help. They agreed to extend some assistance provided

<sup>1</sup>Statement by Miss Florence McGuire, West Liberty, Ky., Mar., 1941.

<sup>2</sup>~~Ibid.~~

<sup>3</sup>Church book in possession of Miss Florence McGuire, clerk.

the church would pay \$500 each year on the debt.<sup>1</sup> It appears that the church failed to pay the amount, but the Society continued to supplement the ministers' salaries for many years. The amount they gave varied from \$50 to \$225. The church kept on paying on the debt and finally got it cleared off.

During the decade from 1910 to 1920 the church made commendable progress. They obtained a new building and had a full-time resident minister the most of the time. Their membership increased to the neighborhood of two hundred. They had a good Sunday School of over one hundred students. The Lord's Supper was celebrated every Lord's Day. This prosperous condition extended into the 1920's and in 1925 they reported 225 members (73 non-resident).<sup>2</sup>

During the last ten years the church has made little progress. In 1930 they reported 145 members.<sup>3</sup> The drop may have been because they were not counting the non-resident members. They have had only half-time preaching and for a year or two only quarter-time.

The last Annual Meeting the church reported 135 members.<sup>4</sup> They have Sunday School and communion every Sunday with an average attendance of seventy. The two Ladies Aid Societies have a membership of about fifty. They give to missions and keep the building in repair. Professor G. C. Banks, of Morehead State Teachers College, preaches for them on Sunday morning twice a month. For his services a few of the members give him \$12.50 each trip.

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<sup>1</sup>Minutes of Kentucky Christian Missionary Convention, 1910-1912.

<sup>2</sup>Minutes of Annual Meeting, 1925.

<sup>3</sup>Minutes of Annual Meeting, 1930.

<sup>4</sup>Minutes of Annual Meeting, 1940.

Blairs Mills Church

This church is also known as the West Union Church. The early records have been destroyed. The present church book goes back to 1908, and has nothing to say about the founding of the church. Mr. J. E. Elam, of Blairs Mills, told me that he was born in 1865 and that the church was established one year later by Hiram Lee (about whom I could find nothing else). Soon a log house was built by the community to be used as both church and school. Later, another house, a one-room frame structure was built for the same purposes.

The church book mentions the ordination of officers in 1908 and then follows with a list of 140 members.<sup>1</sup> No dates are given after the names, but certainly all of these were not members at the same time. It was, nevertheless, a strong rural church.

By 1920 the church had sunk to a low ebb. This is shown in a statement in the church book for August 16, 1920--

"Be it known to all into whose presence this may come, greeting, that whereas the Westunion Church of Christ, Blairs Mills, Kentucky has become in a lukewarm condition and many of its former members moved away and taken membership with the church at other points without letter or notification, And whereas

All have come short of duty to Christ it is deemed necessary by the present pastor J. W. Dunn and the Elders and Deacons to make a new beginning by all coming forward with an open confession and none will be admitted to membership other than by confession,

And whereas there are on the old record the names of many friends, relatives and loved ones that are gone

Be it resolved that those shall be kept and held dear by the Church

Be it resolved that the present officers

Elders            James Cassity  
                    James T. Easterling

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<sup>1</sup>Church book in possession of Mrs. Frank Miles, clerk.

Deacons James Elam  
R. H. Easterling  
shall continue to hold office.<sup>1</sup>

Then a list of forty-one members is given. In 1924 the number was forty.<sup>2</sup> Soon, however, the church began to grow. They had an active Sunday School and quarter-time preaching. In 1931 the building was needing repair. Consequently the church and county school board enlarged and repaired it. Under the ministries of J. W. Dunn and J. F. Walters the church continued to grow and in 1936 reported 129 members.<sup>3</sup>

Since 1936 it has been on a gradual decline. The Sunday School attendance decreased to the place that they ceased trying to have it. The principal reason for this was a union Sunday School conducted in the afternoon at a school house a short distance away. The main attraction seems to be a ball game which follows the Sunday School. In June, 1940, the church clerk informed me that there had been only one addition in the four past years. The membership was then about seventy.

#### Salem Church

The Church of Christ at Antioch, Grassy Creek  
was organized the 1st Lord's Day in Sept. 1866 by  
Elder Parris Robinett

Elders	Moses Lacy
	James W. Nickell
	Wiley C. Wilson
Deacons	Joseph S. Nickell
	James F. Gose
	Preston Wilson
Clerk	S. P. Nickell <sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Minutes of Annual Meeting, 1924.

<sup>3</sup>Minutes of Annual Meeting, 1936.

<sup>4</sup>Church book in possession of Lucien Nickell, clerk.

This is the record of the establishment of the church at Antioch. The name of the church is Antioch; it is located at Salem on Grassy Creek at the Buskirk postoffice. A list of 140 members is given, eighty-seven males and fifty-three females. This includes members up to 1895. There is no way to tell how many were charter members.

At first the church met in the school house. In 1887 they joined with the Baptists and Presbyterians and constructed the present building. It is a large well-built frame structure forty-four feet by thirty-six feet. The boards they used were planed by hand.

Soon after this Jack Howard began preaching at Salem. It was here that he began preaching the Church of God doctrine. He split up the church; took over the Baptists and Presbyterians. A rival Church of God was organized. It continued to meet in the same house. After Howard's death, the Church of God continued for many years but finally died. The Church of Christ carried on but in a weakened condition for it never regained its former strength. In 1924 it reported seventy-five members to the Annual Meeting.<sup>1</sup> Since then it has drifted along until today there are only forty members.<sup>2</sup>

The church tries to have quarter-time preaching but for the last twenty years has often been without any regular preaching. They have no Sunday School and seldom observe the Lord's Supper. Hickman Nickell preaches for them one week end each month. The building is in good condition today because they repaired and painted it in preparation for the Annual Meeting last September, 1940.

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<sup>1</sup>Minutes of Annual Meeting, 1924.

<sup>2</sup>Minutes of Annual Meeting, 1940.

Across the hill from Salem at the Squire Nickell school house a community Sunday School has been functioning for several years. Although the leaders are members at Salem, it sprang up independently. Their Sunday School averages about seventy. A local man or visiting minister preaches each Sunday night and good crowds attend. They have no organized church but are doing more to bring religious education to the people than many of the organized churches.

### Toms Branch Church

The Biblical name of the Toms Branch Church is Bethel. The postoffice is Omer. I could not locate any old records of the church. The present church book goes back only a few years. From talking to several old people who know the church, however, I have pieced together a brief history. The church was established soon after the Civil War, probably by Harry Little. The meetings were held in the school house. As time passed by, other preachers came. One of the favorites was W. L. Lacy. He had some really big meetings at Toms Branch. In fact, the crowd got too large for the school house.<sup>1</sup> This led them to build a church house. This was in 1910 and it is still used as a place of worship. The building is a huge affair for a rural church. It is about forty feet by sixty feet. This fact alone speaks of a large congregation. Some of the old people told me that in that day Toms Branch had larger crowds than any of the churches near there.

Not many years after the construction of the new building the congregation began to shrink. Many folk left the community to obtain positions in "public works." Some of the faithful members died. Younger ones were not trained to take their places. In 1925

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<sup>1</sup>I received this data from Mrs. Mary E. McGuire (born 1857), of Ezel, Ky.



they reported seventy members.<sup>1</sup> The number further decreased until the church practically died. For a few years they had no communion, no Sunday School and seldom any preaching. In 1935 James Lawson from Menifee County became pastor of the church. He reorganized it with twenty-seven members.<sup>2</sup> Under his guidance the membership increased and in 1936 they reported sixty members.<sup>3</sup> They had regular monthly meetings which were well attended. This continued for some time and the interest dropped again. They are still carrying on, however, with Mr. Lawson preaching for them one Sunday each month. Last fall they reported to the Annual Meeting a membership of seventy-one and stated that during the past year they had given their pastor \$5.<sup>4</sup> The Lord's Supper has not been observed for many years. The minister told me that some of the members think that footwashing should be observed in connection with the Lord's Supper. Others do not think it should. Consequently they do not have either.

#### Williams Creek Church

Record of the Colosse Church of Christ.  
We, the people of Elamton Kentucky after deciding the need of a church in our neighborhood, met in a business session and the result of the meeting meant the organization of a church by D. G. Combs March 8, 1886.<sup>5</sup>

Only a few members constituted the church at its beginning, but by 1892 it had grown to have sixty members. The Biblical name of

<sup>1</sup>Minutes of Annual Meeting, 1925.

<sup>2</sup>Church book in possession of Mrs. Pearlle Barker, clerk.

<sup>3</sup>Minutes of Annual Meeting, 1936.

<sup>4</sup>Minutes of Annual Meeting, 1940.

<sup>5</sup>Church book in possession of Mrs. Ova Maxey, clerk.

the church is Colosse (often corrupted into "Gollash"). It is located at Elamton, Kentucky, on Williams Creek, a tributary of Elk Fork. All four names are used to distinguish the church.

The new congregation met in the school house near "B" Williams' home. This lasted but a few years. Then a union church house was constructed near it. Two brands of Baptists, the Methodists and Christians had one Sunday each month. Actually it was more of a community center than a place of worship. Entertainments were given, box and pie suppers were held, the magistrate even conducted his court in it.

About 1915 the minister of the church, Jiles Beculhimer, began preaching that footwashing, as well as the Lord's Supper, was an ordinance of the church. The elders objected to this and Jiles saw it expedient to leave. With him he took eight or ten members and they organized a "New Christian Church." A few more joined them. Because Jiles Beculhimer and Elbert Nickell were the leaders, a local wag nicknamed them the "Nickenhammer Church." This group lasted about six months and then they disbanded, the majority going into the Regular Baptist Church.

By 1921 the church building was in such bad repair that some of the people wanted to fix it. The plan did not materialize, however, and the Church of Christ began meeting in a school house at the mouth of the creek. This was four miles from the old building and out of the way for the majority of the members. Consequently in 1928 they came three miles back up the creek and constructed a new frame building.

In 1924 the membership of the church was eighty-eight. It

remained near that level until 1930 and then it dropped to fifty.<sup>1</sup> For several years they have tried to conduct a Sunday School, but the men take little interest. It consists of fifteen to twenty children and three or four women. Their ideal used to be to have the Lord's Supper once a month--on each preaching day. Three years ago, though, several Baptists were attending their meetings. They refused to commune because the Church of Christ did not wash feet also. This put them in an uncomfortable position. The result was that the Church of Christ ceased having communion. The rulin' elder explained that to have it put a "chill on the meeting." To the Annual Meeting last September they reported, no additions nor death and no pastor selected.<sup>2</sup> Their membership still remains at fifty.

#### Bethany Church

The Bethany Church is located on Tarkiln Branch at Matthew postoffice. The exact date of its founding is unknown. Many members of the White Oak Church lived in the community and would have preachers to hold meetings in private homes and school houses. One of the favorite places was the Shoal Branch school house, three miles from White Oak "the way the crow flies" and considerably farther by land. After the school was moved to the Mouth of Rockhouse (three-fourths of a mile) the Baptist and Church of Christ members still used it as a meeting place.

In 1886 the Church of Christ began work on a twenty-four feet by forty feet frame building on Tarkiln Branch, a quarter of a mile from the school house. At its completion in 1888 W. L. Lady dedicated

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<sup>1</sup>Minutes of Annual Meeting, 1930.

<sup>2</sup>Minutes of Annual Meeting, 1940.

it. I could not find any record of the organization of the church, but assume that it was not formally organized until 1886. I may be in error because it could easily have been before that time.

Kentucky has the reputation of getting greatly wrought up during elections. Some of the "hottest" elections ever held in the state were local school elections. At Matthew, an election which took place about 1896 had an important effect upon the church. Without going into the details of the affair (which is difficult to do), it resulted in splitting the church. One faction pulled out, went over on Lacy Creek and established "New Hope" Church. Evidently they hoped for a better condition than had existed at Bethany. The old feelings died down in a few years, however, and several of the people went back to Bethany. The number of members at that time is uncertain. The church book contains a large number of names but fails to give the date of their entrance into the church.

In the first part of this century the church got along reasonably well. They had quarter-time preaching and an occasional revival meeting. Communion was usually served on preaching days and part of the time they had a Sunday School. At the roll call on Homecoming Day in 1924 they gave a list of forty-two members.<sup>1</sup>

In 1926 Bethany enjoyed another church fight. This time it was over the selection of a minister. Two men were under consideration; one of them was present. Well, the election got so bitter that several of the members got up and left the meeting. The man who was present was called. The opposition refused to attend his meetings. That fall the opposing elders took the affair to the Annual Meeting,

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<sup>1</sup>Church book in possession of Noah Nickell, clerk.

which promptly withdrew fellowship from the church without taking sides with either party. In a few months the factions agreed to forgive each other. Their action is explained in a statement in the church book dated April 27, 1927.

To whom it may concern,

The Church of Christ at Matthew Kentucky having been withdrawn from by the Annual Meeting of 1926. Said Church decided that they desired to be reinstated with the Annual Body. After due consideration they called elders J. F. Walters, Harlen Murphy and Hickman Nickell to hold a meeting in order to be reinstated. The results of the meeting were as follows:

The Church was reinstated by confession of faith. Officers appointed. They selected James Nickell of Wolfe County as pastor.

The number reinstated was forty-nine. The Annual minutes made no mention of Bethany in 1927 but in 1928 recorded that Bethany was received in full fellowship.

The practice of excluding "unworthy" members has kept the church in an uproar for several years. In 1919 W. Canada Nickell was elected an elder of the church. He took the position seriously. Looking over the members he decided that several were unworthy, that they were disgracing the church, and he, an elder, was partially responsible. Although it was an unpleasant task, he felt that he had to attempt to bring them back to the fold and if the attempt failed, to withdraw fellowship from them. First Mr. Nickell would talk to the "guilty" ones, and if they did not repent he would take it before the church. If the offenders tried to prove their innocence, it meant they would have a trial. "The Bethany Church vs. the defendant." Each party brought witnesses to testify. The inevitable result was disastrous for the church. A common reason for being excluded was getting drunk. In 1933 Canada awoke (or his wife awoke him) to the fact that several members of the church had been married twice and that

the first partner was still living. Consequently, those members were excluded. Mr. Nickell did suggest that it would be all right for them to live together as brother and sister in order to raise their children! The two other elders reluctantly agreed that unworthy members should be thrown out but felt that it would cause so much trouble and division that it would do more harm than leaving them in the church. The old brother was utterly sincere but was without the least inkling of tact and diplomacy. The policy unavoidably made enemies of those that were excluded and of their friends. It even caused an ill feeling among those remaining in the church.<sup>1</sup>

Five or six years ago Alva Sizemore and Joe Jones, students of Christian Normal Institute, Grayson, Kentucky, held a "big revival" at Bethany. They had large crowds, revived the church and baptized many people. They encouraged the Sunday School and even started a Christian Endeavor. But, nothing was done to train leaders. Christian Endeavor soon died and later the Sunday School followed it. The church has continued to have quarter-time preaching and to the Annual last fall they reported forty-two members.<sup>2</sup>

#### Lacy Creek Church

The congregation of the Church of Christ worshipping at New Hope, Morgan County, Kentucky Organized by Elder Henry D. Adams May 11, 1896, with the officers qualified to take oversight of said congregation (viz),

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<sup>1</sup>These facts were obtained in a conference with Mrs. W. C. Nickell (Mr. Nickell died 1939) and Noah Nickell, a son, at Matthew, Ky., June, 1940.

<sup>2</sup>Minutes of Annual Meeting, 1940.

J. Frank McGuire	}	Elders
James Cox		
W. M. Ross		
John Frederick		
Mart Baker	}	Deacons
Frank Conley		
W. M. Bolin		
Riley Patton, Treasurer		
M. J. Elam, Clerk <sup>1</sup>		

The New Hope Church, located on Lacy Creek at Florress, Kentucky, was organized with thirty-seven members. The immediate cause of its organization was a church fight at Bethany. Several of the members came to Lacy Creek and gathered a few more who were members of the churches at White Oak and Williams Creek. Lacy Creek Church was located at almost a central point from the three churches. In spite of the fact that it was organized because of a church dispute, it did answer the need of a church on Lacy Creek. Even though some of the members later went back to Bethany it continued to function.

Soon the church began work on a frame building. They never finished it but worshipped in it five years. Then they traded their lot which had been donated by Sylvester Helton, to Myrtle and Ashland Osborn for a lot one-half mile from there. It was a better location, being at the place where the Right-Hand-Fork and Contrary-Fork flow into the main fork of Lacy Creek. The house was torn down and the lumber was used to construct the new house. Soon it was suitable for use but was not finished. They began having their meetings in it. As the members got time they would spend a few days working on it. No blue prints had been prepared and each "carpenter" built as he pleased. Consequently they got the building in a "mess." Finally after almost twenty years, they hired carpenters to finish it. The

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<sup>1</sup> Church book in possession of Henry Cox, elder and clerk.

fourth of July, 1920, W. L. Lacy dedicated the building.

The Church of Christ members did the most in getting the church building but upon the insistence of Myrtle and Ashland Osborn the bond states that "the deed is to be made for a union church house for all denominations in good standing to preach in."<sup>1</sup> In 1925 a Regular Baptist Church was organized at Lacy Creek. The two groups use the building.

At present they do not have a Sunday School. To celebrate the Lord's Supper is a rare thing. Their membership is forty-three.<sup>2</sup> Hickman Nickell has been preaching for them the fourth Sunday in each month for the last fifteen years. They give him about one dollar each preaching day.<sup>3</sup>

#### Adele Church

About 1900 W. L. Lacy moved to Adele (Insko postoffice). Finding no church there he proceeded to organize one. They met in the school house and usually had regular monthly preaching.<sup>4</sup> In 1925 they reported seventy members to the Annual.<sup>5</sup> Two years later the Annual Meeting was held at Adele but since then there has been no mention of the church in the minutes of the Annual Meetings. Brother Lacy died at Adele in 1935 but had been unable to preach for several years. About 1937 J. F. Walters preached one year at Adele to try to revive

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<sup>1</sup>Office of County Court Clerk. The bond was made March 14, 1918, and recorded January 5, 1926.

<sup>2</sup>Minutes of Annual Meeting, 1940.

<sup>3</sup>Statement by Hickman Nickell, June, 1940.

<sup>4</sup>Statement by Cebren Lacy (son of W. L. Lacy) at Adele, Ky., June, 1940.

<sup>5</sup>Minutes of Annual Meeting, 1925.



the work. Since then they have had only occasional preaching. At present there may be about twenty members of the Church of Christ in the community, but there is no organized church.

### Cannel City

The opening of the coal mines at Cannel City brought large numbers into the village. Many of these were members of the Church of Christ. They joined with the Methodists, Presbyterians, and Baptists and supplied the material to construct a union church house. Each church had one Sunday for preaching and all joined in the union Sunday School.<sup>1</sup> To be more exact, only the Church of Christ and the Methodist formally organized churches, but the Presbyterians and the Baptists equally shared with them in the use of the building.

Cannel City grew to be a village of eight hundred people. Business was good. The church prospered. They had a large Sunday School. But, in the 1920's the coal industry slowed down and in the early 1930's the mines ceased to operate. This caused the people to move away and today the village has a population of about 150. The union Sunday School carries on, largely because of the backing of Dr. J. D. Whitaker, a Methodist physician who lives there. Although a few members of the Church of Christ live there they have not had preaching services in several years. The Methodist preacher from West Liberty preaches there one Sunday in each month.

### Wrigley

At Wrigley, the same thing happened that did at Cannel City. Early in the century a large number of members of the Church of Christ

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<sup>1</sup>

Statement by Dr. J. D. Whitaker, Cannel City, Ky., June, 1940.

moved into Wrigley. Sanford Adkins, a preacher from Elliot County, was one of them. Through his efforts a Church of Christ was established. They met in the school house for their regular monthly meetings.<sup>1</sup>

In 1925 this church reported forty-five members to the Annual Meeting.<sup>2</sup> The next year the Annual was held at Wrigley. About this time or a little before, the local industries began to leave the community and consequently the people left too. In 1928 Brother Adkins died. For these various reasons the church ceased to exist.

### Licking River

October 6, 1926, Harlen Murphy and J. F. Walters organized a church with twenty-six members in the Licking River community five miles northwest of West Liberty.<sup>3</sup> The church called Dewey Havens to be its minister. He preached for them three years. After him, Harlen Murphy served for one year and Willie Duan followed him for the same length of time. No other preachers came but H. M. Wells kept the Sunday School going until his death in 1935. At present there are about a dozen members of the Licking River Church.<sup>4</sup>

A few other churches (that I know practically nothing about) should be mentioned. At our Annual last September, H. H. Collins, one of our old preachers, told me that there used to be a Mt. Zion Church in the northern part of the county. In 1899 the building was

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<sup>1</sup>Statement by Wilbur Adkins, son of Sanford Adkins, Wrigley, Ky., Sept., 1940.

<sup>2</sup>Minutes of Annual Meeting, 1925.

<sup>3</sup>Minutes of Annual Meeting, 1928.

<sup>4</sup>Statement by Mrs. Ezra Wells, West Liberty, Ky., June, 1940.

burnt and the church soon died. Mr. Ruben Cassity of West Liberty informed me that there used to be a church at Redwine. No doubt there were other small churches, which have since passed away, that I know nothing about.

SOME OF THE PREACHERS AND DELEGATES  
AT THE ANNUAL MEETING, SEPTEMBER 17, 1910  
FLORRESS, KY.



**First Row**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
4. John Bays
5. IKE Howard
6. W. Cebron Nickell
7. Morrison Nickell
8. W. L. Lacy
9. Allen May
10. Monroe Brown  
(Falkner & Brown)

(BILL ROSS)

**Second Row**

- 1.
- 2.
3. Jim Ned Elam
- 4.
5. Bill Ross
6. Doug Keith
- 7.
8. Cebron Lacy
9. Giles Beculhimer
10. Anthony Lowe

**Third Row**

1. Hiram Cisco
2. WILL COX
3. ANDY BLEVINS
4. RH NICKELL
5. Jim Cox
- 6.
7. Wallace McGuire
8. John McGuire
- 9.

Reading from Left to Right

## Chapter 5: BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES OF PREACHERS

The purpose of this chapter is to give a brief view of the type of preacher produced in Morgan County and to aid in perpetuating their memory. Numerous names are known and loved by the older generation but the rising generation knows little about these worthy men. If their names are not recorded, many of them will soon be forgotten. Even at present many of the early ones are forgotten and in other instances, some story or humorous happening is all that is known of them. In regard to others, tradition, church records, and family Bibles give fairly complete biographies.

### Joseph Nickell

I was born in the year of Our Lord in 1792 in Clark County Kentucky, raised in Montgomery County Kentucky, moved to Morgan County Kentucky in October 1813 and married Rachel Kash December 16, 1813 and she departed this life the 15th day of January 1853. I, Joseph Nickell, joined the Baptist Church in 1820 and in the year 1833 myself --

These words are found in the old family Bible which is in the possession of Mr. Nickell's great grandson, Stanley Dennis, West Liberty, Kentucky. The statement's abrupt ending is due to the fact that the rest of the page is torn off. It probably said that he became a member of the Church of Christ. He probably wrote that when he was an old man, and if it did say that he became a member of the Church of Christ, he missed the date one year. According to the White Oak Church book he became a member in 1832. Further proof that it was in 1832 is given in a newspaper clipping of the obituary of his wife, Rachel, in 1853. It states that "Mrs. Nickell joined the Baptist Church in her 16th year and in 1832 with her husband united with the Christian Church."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Among the papers in Mr. Nickell's family Bible in possession of Stanley Dennis, West Liberty, Ky.

As far as I could discover, Mr. Nickell never went to school. He never learned to read or write until he was married and his wife taught him.

Soon after he joined the Baptist Church he began preaching. When converted by Raccoon John Smith in 1832 he traded his Calvinism for the New Testament and began preaching it. Mr. Nickell, the first Church of Christ preacher to live in the county, took a leading part in the White Oak Church, the first Church of Christ in the county. Through his labors, Old Grassy and Ezel Churches were established. His work also extended into other counties. To him goes credit for organizing the Annual Meeting. He served as its honored chairman as long as his health would permit.

"Preacher Joe", as he was affectionately called, became the best-liked preacher in Morgan County. He was in constant demand to conduct funerals and weddings. In fact, some people thought that only Preacher Joe could bury a person and that a wedding would hardly be legal unless he performed it.

By his first wife, Preacher Joe had eleven children. Soon after her death he married Mary Jane Trimble. She bore him one child. They had been married only two years when she died. A little later he was married the third time to Zarilda White, who outlived him.

During the Civil War his family was divided. Three of his sons favored the North and three the South; one joined the Northern Army and one the Southern. Preacher Joe remained neutral and after the war reunited his family.

Preacher Joe, well loved by all and firm in his faith, departed this life December 13, 1875, and was buried in the Ezel Cemetery. In a patriotic address, delivered by Colonel J. T. Hazelrigg at West

Liberty, July 4, 1876, tribute was paid to the grand old patriarch in these words --

The Christian church has perhaps the largest membership of any denomination in the county, Elder Joseph Nickell, who did more than any one else to plant the reformation in Morgan county and build it up to its present proportion, passed to his reward last year. A lineal descendant of one of the original settlers of the county, he did more for the advancement of the church, and left the impress of his exalted private character and moral worth deeper upon the community than any man perhaps who ever lived in the county. Repudiating human creeds, holding up the Bible as the only infallible rule of faith and practice, and teaching men to believe what God has commanded, and to obey his commands as the full measure of his duty, he accomplished a work that will endure as a proud monument to his memory.<sup>1</sup>

#### Dr. Daniel Dillon

Very little is known about Dr. Dillon. He was born in Virginia and later emigrated to Bath County, Kentucky. During the 1850's he spent a great deal of time in Morgan County practicing medicine and preaching. To him goes the credit for establishing the West Liberty Church.

#### Harry Little

This man was a younger contemporary of Joseph Nickell. His home was near the Morgan County line in the edge of Wolfe County, but when he was born it was a part of Morgan. Many old people remember Mr. Little as an old time preacher. Those with whom I talked never failed to mention his high-pitched voice. Some claimed that it would echo up and down the hollows and could be heard for miles. They added, though, that it was not harsh but beautiful indeed. The old man died about 1900 when he was seventy or eighty years old.

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<sup>1</sup>Col. J. T. Hazelrigg's speech is reprinted in the Licking Valley Courier Supplement, Dec. 27, 1923.

John D. Bays

Another younger contemporary of Preacher Joe was John Bays. He was born June 4, 1831. In 1850 he was married to Nancy Jane Cooper, and they reared a large family of nine children. He was converted at the age of twenty-five and a few years later began preaching. The most of his life was spent on his farm on Lick Creek in the edge of Magoffin County near the Morgan County line.

"Uncle John" was more of an exhorter than a textual preacher. Often he would get to preaching in a big way and drift into a "sing-song." Then he simply sang his sermon. As I have already stated, Preacher Joe was chairman of the Annual for many years. Uncle John succeeded him, and retained the position for about forty years. He lived to the ripe age of eighty-one and his life closed in November, 1912.<sup>1</sup>

Raney C. Maxey

Raney C. Maxey was born in Morgan County September 9, 1841. At the age of twenty-five he married Joan Elam, and they reared six children. He was converted in his early manhood but did not begin preaching until several years after he was married. The most of his ministerial labors were in Morgan but many of the neighboring counties benefitted by his service. It is estimated that he baptized six hundred persons.

Sometime before his death, he and John Bays made an agreement that the funeral of the one who died first should be preached by the other. August 20, 1911, both were having a meeting in the Williams Creek Church. While Brother Maxey was preaching he became ill and had

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<sup>1</sup>Letter from Miss Gypsy Griffith, Feb., 1941.



to be carried from the building. Uncle John arose and continued the meeting. A few minutes later Mr. Maxey died. In fulfillment of the pact, Mr. Bays preached the funeral of his very dear friend.

William Leander Lacy

W. L. Lacy was born November 14, 1849, in Morgan County, Kentucky.<sup>1</sup> As a youth he was converted to Christ and did some "talking in public." It was not until he was thirty that he was ordained and began regular preaching. In 1868 he was married to Elizabeth Walters. They reared a large family of ten children. Mr. Lacy's formal education lasted only three months but through his own study he gained an education superior to any of the local Morgan County preachers in his time. He became a teacher in the rural schools and followed the profession for fifteen years. Once when he was holding a revival in the Blue Grass, a student of the College of the Bible asked him what college he attended. He replied, "Pine Knot College in my father's home in Morgan County."

Practically all of the preachers in Morgan County made their living by farming, and were considered "good livers." Mr. Lacy tried the same thing. Most of the time he was a renter, however, and was very poor. When his wife inherited a farm, they sold it to buy medicine to try to cure him of diabetes.<sup>2</sup> The management and operation of the farm was left to his wife and children. The story is told that he would go to the field with them, and while they worked, he would sit in the shade and read the New Testament. Being afflicted with

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<sup>1</sup>Statement written by Mr. Lacy in one of his books in possession of his son, Cebron, at Adele, Ky.

<sup>2</sup>Statement by Cebron Lacy.

diabetes, though, he probably did not feel able to work. For about twenty years he was on such a strict diet that his main food was wheat bran mixed with water and baked.<sup>1</sup> Even after his diabetes was cured he was left a weakly man.

Part of his poverty was obliterated when the Kentucky Christian Missionary Society employed him as an evangelist in 1889. It did not pretend to pay him a full salary but did extend him some aid. It varied from \$10 to \$200 a year and averaged about \$70.<sup>2</sup> While the most of his labors were in Morgan County, he made many journeys into other mountain counties and even into central Kentucky and held revivals. He baptized more people than any other Morgan County preacher in his day.<sup>3</sup> Speaking before the Kentucky Christian Missionary Convention in 1898, the State Evangelist, Mr. H. W. Elliot, spoke of him as being "a very satisfactory man" and "one of the best we have ever had in Eastern Kentucky." Mr. Lacy continued to serve as an evangelist with the exception of a few years, until he was forced to retire. Then the Society extended to him a small pension, which he received until his death in 1935.<sup>4</sup>

Evangelist Lacy was very meticulous about his clothes. He wore a Prince Albert winter and summer. My father, J. K. Bolin, tells of hearing him close some of his sermons with a hearty exhortation concerning the resurrection. He used big words, high-sounding phrases

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<sup>1</sup>Statement by Hickman Nickell, Peyton, Ky., March, 1941.

<sup>2</sup>Minutes of Kentucky Christian Missionary Convention from 1889 to 1917 and a few copies after that.

<sup>3</sup>Common opinion held by the leaders of the churches in Morgan Co.

<sup>4</sup>Statement by Cebren Lacy.

and waxed very eloquent. In the midst of this he would extend both arms and make them quiver until the rattling of his gold cuff links could be heard all over the house.

In contrast to his eloquence in the pulpit, in private he was a very calm and humble man. In fact, he was a poor conversationalist and simply would not argue. If he saw that a conversation was leading into an argument he merely walked away. While his nature was extremely serious, he had several jokes that he would tell in the pulpit, but always for a purpose. If some of the young people talked too loudly he might tell this story: Once when a boy was talking too loud in the church, the preacher called him down. After the service the mother rebuked the preacher by saying that the boy was not in his right mind because a "muley steer" had kicked him. This usually caused the disturbers to see the point and cease talking.

#### W. Cebron Nickell

One of our best-known preachers and most picturesque character in Morgan County is "Uncle Cebe Nickell." He was born on Grassy Creek November 1, 1854. At the age of twenty-one he was married and has reared seven children. Soon after he was married he became a member of the church. A few years later he began preaching.

Most of the older preachers were "great at exhortation," often at the expense of doctrine. Uncle Cebe told me that he saw the need of more doctrine in the church and decided that he would preach it.<sup>1</sup> This he did. It has gained him the reputation of being "strong on doctrine." He was a diligent student of the New Testament and in his prime knew the most of it by memory.

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<sup>1</sup>Interview with W. C. Nickell, June, 1940.

Uncle Cebe and Leander Lacy were cousins and often preached together, but the two men were entirely different in many respects. Leander did not work very much--Cebe was one of the hardest workers in the county. Mr. Lacy was very precise with his language but Uncle Cebe cared little as long as his hearers understood what he was talking about. The first was very particular about his clothes--the latter was indifferent. Someone overheard a conversation between them one day as they returned from meeting. As they rode along, Mr. Lacy said, "Well, Nickell, Leander made the hills ring today!" "Yes," replied Uncle Cebe, "and Nickell wasn't far behind!"

The preachers who have been honored by their brethren to serve as chairman of the Annual Meetings have usually held the office for many years. The first was Joseph Nickell who was succeeded by John Bays. After Mr. Bays, Uncle Cebe became chairman and served for twenty or twenty-five years.

Uncle Cebe is eighty-six years old and still living. He has not been able to preach very much for several years. He spends his time wandering over the county, staying with his children and friends. Although he is rather feeble, he usually walks. His children would take him in their cars, or would rather have him stay in one place and be well cared for. After staying at one place a day or a week, he may take a sudden notion to go someplace else. It is useless to try to stop him. If he decides to stop someplace along the road, he walks in, sets down his satchel and stays. Almost everyone in the county knows him and "Uncle Cebe" is always welcome.

Bruce Adkins

Bruce Adkins was born December 9, 1859, in Morgan County, Kentucky (when Elliot was formed in 1869, his community became a part of the new county). At an early age he was married and reared six children. His wife died in 1904 and he spent the rest of his life with his children (mostly in Morgan County).

In 1898 he was elected to the Kentucky Legislature and served for two terms.

When Mr. Adkins was converted and began preaching he revealed great possibilities. After several years a tragedy befell him, which practically killed his ministry. He lost his voice and could not speak above a whisper. Even then he would sometimes get so interested in a meeting that he would arise and attempt to say a few words.

December 26, 1939, his worthwhile but tragically hampered life ended.<sup>1</sup>

Jack Howard

Jack Howard is a name remembered and loved or hated by the most of the members of the Church of Christ in Morgan County. Some of them bitterly condemn him, while others mention his name with reverent respect. All of them witness to his power as a preacher. His fame is almost legendary. The following is the inscription carved on his tombstone in the Esel Cemetery:

Elder J A  
Howard  
Mountain  
Evangelist  
born  
Jan. 1, 1867  
died  
Sept. 11, 1895

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<sup>1</sup> Gordon Adkins, son of Bruce Adkins and Mrs. Etna Wells, a daughter; both of West Liberty, Ky.

Jack Howard was born in Magoffin County. There he was married and began preaching. In the early 1890's he came down into Morgan and preached in various communities. J. M. Downing, Eastern Kentucky Evangelist, was so favorably impressed by him that he began plans to get him into the College of the Bible at Lexington.

Religious debates were common at that time. At White Oak, Howard and Sam Adams (a semi-Quaker recently from Virginia) had a debate. In the course of it, Adams became so staunch in his position that he cried out, "If I am not right I hope that I may never speak again!" Three or four days later he died. This fact proved a great boon to Howard's already expanding reputation.

A short while after Mr. Howard came to the county he began preaching a new doctrine. When the Restoration Movement reached Morgan County the church was spoken of as the "Christian Church." In Howard's day the term "Christian Church" was still used but the more common name was "Church of Christ." Howard began preaching that the name was "Church of God." In regard to other doctrines he was in substantial agreement with his brethren but the question of the name caused trouble. Division arose in the churches. The people began to take sides. As Howard became more insistent, the other preachers began to condemn his doctrine. Mr. Downing dropped his plan to get him into the College of the Bible. This enraged Howard. He challenged anybody to debate him on the subject. While other preachers hesitated, Uncle Cebe Nickell accepted his challenge. They were to have a three-day debate in the Salem Church. After the first day, though, Mr. Howard quit, complaining that Uncle Cebe was too hard on him! Neither man altered his position. The debate did serve to draw tighter the line of division. At the following Annual Meeting Mr. Nickell made the motion that the

name of Jack Howard be dropped from the list of preachers because of his heresy.<sup>1</sup> The minutes for that Annual record the fact in these words, "By the action of the Meeting the name of J. A. Howard was struck from the list of preachers."<sup>2</sup>

By this time Jack Howard had begun establishing "Churches of God" in Morgan and neighboring counties. His followers were called "Howardites." His sway reached beyond the Church of Christ. He won many Baptists and Presbyterians and others who did not belong to any church. In fact, the movement spread like wild fire. After establishing several churches they began holding "Union Meetings" similar to our Annual Meetings.

Dynamic, but friendly and smiling Howard, went forward with all his might. Wherever he went huge crowds flocked to hear him. At Morehead he found the churches closed to him, so he preached in the court house. Literally thousands came from far and near. He defied the world and offered to debate any living man. He challenged some of the local Church of Christ members to send for some of their "big guns" to meet him. They called Mr. J. S. Kendrick, a recent graduate of the College of the Bible. Permission was received to hold the debate in the Baptist Church. Before the debate, Mr. Kendrick asked Mr. Howard what would be the length of the debate. He replied, "Until one goes down!" At the first session Howard spoke for two hours and fifteen minutes, and Kendrick only fifteen minutes. The next day, however, Kendrick spoke for two hours. Howard arose and after a few minutes began to cry and sat down. The debate ended and he returned

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<sup>1</sup>Uncle Cobe Nickell gave me this information, June, 1940.

<sup>2</sup>Minutes of Annual Meeting, 1893, in the possession of Mrs. J. F. Maxey, Elamton, Ky.

to his home at Ezal. A few weeks later he died of typhoid fever.

The names of several other preachers that I know little about should be mentioned. These men served in the last half of the nineteenth century, and some reached into the present century. They were Parris Robinett, Hiram Lee, J. Milt McGuire and Frank McGuire. Others were Thomas Cooper, Lacy Brown, Morrison Nickell, Sanford Adkins, brothers Henry and Matthew Adams, and brothers Andy and Marion Stamper. James Thomas Pieratt is especially remembered because of his love for "dinner on the ground." "Jim Tom Meetin' and dinner on the ground," is a slogan still heard in Morgan County. William Yocum ("Stringer Bill," six feet, six inches) is remembered for his height and loud voice. One day as he rode to his meeting at Salem, he stopped at the home of one of the members, three-fourths of a mile below the church, to talk. When Mr. Yocum asked him if he were coming up to hear him preach, he received the reply, "No, brother Yocum, I'll sit hers and hear you."

A long list of men have come into the county for revivals or to stay a few years. Many teachers at Hazel Green Academy have served various churches in the county. This list includes D. G. Combs, J. M. Downing, J. T. McGarvey, H. J. Derthick, J. W. Hatcher, W. H. Book and others.<sup>1</sup>

I have heard the statement that many Morgan County boys have done well after leaving there. That is certainly true in regard to the next four men I am going to discuss.

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<sup>1</sup>For a biography of D. G. Combs see J. W. West's book, Sketches of our Mountain Pioneers, Lynchburg, Va., 1939.



H. G. Haney

H. G. Haney was born on Grassy Creek in Morgan County, October 3, 1888. His parents were members of the Baptist Church, but after he finished common school they sent him to Hazel Green Academy. Graduating in 1912 he continued his studies in Transylvania and received the A.B. degree in 1916. After serving as lieutenant in the World War he returned to the College of the Bible and received the B.D. degree in 1920. In 1922 he became minister of the Battery Park Christian Church, Richmond, Virginia, and has remained with the congregation until the present. His education has been continued and he earned the D.D. degree from the Union Theological Seminary (Presbyterian) in Richmond. Dr. Haney has served for several years as president of the Virginia Christian Missionary Society as well as having served on many boards and committees of the whole brotherhood. Mr. Haney married Levina Oldham Combs of Lexington, Kentucky. They have three boys.<sup>1</sup>

F. W. Long

F. W. Long is another Morgan County boy who went to Hazel Green and became a minister of the Christian Church. At present he is serving in Clifton Forge, Virginia.<sup>2</sup>

Dewey H. Havens

Dewey Havens was born May 19, 1898, on Grassy Creek, Morgan County. At the age of thirteen he joined the Grassy Lick Baptist Church although his parents were members of the Old Grassy Church of Christ. When he became twenty he decided to become a minister.

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<sup>1</sup>Letter from H. G. Haney, August 15, 1940.

<sup>2</sup>Statement of Nancy M. Maple, Secretary of Hazel Green Academy.

Consequently he placed membership with the Old Grassy Church and was ordained. Soon he became minister of his home church and an evangelist. Realizing the need of more education he attended Hazel Green Academy. In 1927 he enrolled in the College of the Bible and received the Degree of English Bible in 1931. After serving various churches in central Kentucky, two years ago he was called to the ministry of the London, Kentucky, Church. Mr. Havens is married and has three sons.<sup>1</sup>

#### Orville W. Williams

O. W. Williams was born near Cannel City, Kentucky, on February 23, 1903. After attending Hazel Green Academy he took some work at Eureka College, Eureka, Illinois. Mr. Williams held various pastorates and served as an evangelist for several years. In 1933 he was called to his present position as minister of the Christian Church at McArthur, Ohio. Mr. Williams is married and has two children--a boy and a girl.<sup>2</sup>

#### John William Dunn

Willie Dunn was born March 11, 1867, in Wolfe County and in 1870 moved to Morgan. In 1885 he married Sarah Carroll and they reared a large family of twelve children. When Mr. Dunn was eighteen he was converted and began taking an active part in church, serving as deacon, Sunday School teacher and choir leader. He was forty-five years old when he was ordained a minister. The remainder of his life he served as pastor of various churches and as evangelist. October 31, 1934, at the age of sixty-seven, he passed to his reward.

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<sup>1</sup>Letter from D. H. Havens, March, 1941.

<sup>2</sup>Letter from O. W. Williams, April 2, 1941.

Willie Dunn had the reputation of being a good man. When Mr. W. C. Nickell got too old to be chairman of the Annual Meeting, the position was given to Mr. Dunn. While his education was limited, he was a great lover of books. Being very devoted to the ministry he would often ride forty or fifty miles to fill an appointment.<sup>1</sup>

Thomas Albert Rasnick

Mr. Rasnick was born in 1859 in Russell County, Virginia, and later emigrated to Morgan County, Kentucky. He was converted when he was thirty-seven years old but never began preaching until twenty years later. He is another old country preacher and lives on a farm near Yocum.<sup>2</sup>

H. H. Collins

At Mt. Sterling, Kentucky, 1864, H. H. Collins was born, the son of Carter and Mary Collins. When he was six his parents moved to Morgan County where he has lived ever since. In 1882 he married Cynthia Lewis and they have reared nine children.

Mr. Collins was converted by Marion Stamper when he was seventeen years old. Before long he began preaching. While most of his ministry has been in Morgan County, he has taken a few preaching trips into other parts of the state and into other states. He has made his living on the farm. Not once, he told me, did he ever take up a collection for himself.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Letter from his daughter, Mrs. Ollie McGuire, Yocum, Ky., Feb., 1941.

<sup>2</sup>Mr. Rasnick gave me these facts at the Annual Meeting, Sept., 1940.

<sup>3</sup>Mr. Collins gave me these facts at the Annual Meeting, Sept., 1940.

James Lawson

Although Jim Lawson lives in Menifee County, much of his ministry has been in Morgan, and he should be included in this group. He was born in Elliot County, January 4, 1874, the son of Jerry and Mary Lawson. At the age of ten his parents moved to Menifee County and he has lived there on a farm ever since. He married Elizabeth Cox and they have reared eight children.

Mr. Lawson was converted at the age of thirty-one by Sam Whit. Soon he began preaching and has held pastorates in Morgan, Menifee, and Bath Counties. Each fall he finds time to hold two or three revivals. He told me that he never mentions money to the churches and has averaged receiving about \$20 per year since he has been in the ministry.<sup>1</sup>

Harlen Murphy

June 7, 1870, at Bonnie, Kentucky, Harlen Murphy was born, the son of J. V. Murphy. He was converted by Harry Little when he was fifteen. At the age of twenty-one he was married to Lou McGuire. The following year he was stricken down with rheumatism and stomach trouble. He remained an invalid for seven years. During this time he did some serious thinking. He decided that he was not living good enough. Consequently, he began reading the Bible and when he got well was ordained and began preaching.

Mr. Murphy continued his labors on the farm and was also selected magistrate of his district. During National Prohibition he became U.S. Commissioner for the county. Since then he has been elected to the county school board and has served in other public

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<sup>1</sup>Mr. Lawson gave me these facts at the Annual Meeting, Sept., 1940.

offices. By his first wife he reared four children. In 1929 she died and ten years later he married widow Maude Williams. They live in West Liberty.

In the first part of the century Mr. Murphy joined with the Howardites and was their leading preacher for a few years. Seeing their program dwindle, however, he came back into the Church of Christ. The last few years he has had the honored position of being chairman of the Annual Meeting.<sup>1</sup>

#### R. Hickman Nickell

Hickman Nickell was born on Stacey Fork of Caney Creek, Morgan County, September 23, 1877, the youngest of a family of twenty-one children. His father, Joe Desha Nickell, was the father of twenty-two children, one by his second wife. In 1900 Mr. Nickell married Elizabeth Deborde. They have reared two children.

Mr. Nickell, or "Uncle Hick," as he is usually called today, was baptized when he was fifteen. For several years he would pray in public and "introduce" but he was thirty-eight years old before he was ordained as a minister. W. L. Lacy ordained him at Salem Church. Since then he has held several pastorates. He is a good Bible student and a very conscientious preacher, but not a forceful speaker. In fact, he fails to put across what he actually knows. He makes no pretense at being a "big preacher" but a better man in Morgan County cannot be found. He does what he can for the Lord in a quiet, humble way--content if he succeeds, content if he fails.

Along with his farming, he worked for many years in the coal mine at Cannel City. He has preached for one church each fourth

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<sup>1</sup>These facts were given to me by Mr. Murphy in June, 1940.

Sunday for about fifteen years. Often he has ridden a horse or walked. They have averaged giving him, he told me, about one dollar a trip. Fifteen years' service for \$180:<sup>1</sup>

#### Jerry Kellas Bolin

J. K. Bolin was born May 19, 1880, on Lacy Creek, Morgan County. His parents were W. M. and Cynthia Bolin. As a young man he married Cynthia Ellen Williams and they reared five children, three boys and two girls.<sup>2</sup>

When "J. K." was twenty years old he was baptized and began preaching. He has held pastorates in Morgan and Floyd Counties and conducted several revival meetings. The most of his life has been spent on the farm, but a considerable amount of his time has been devoted to work in lumber camps, coal mines, and gas line construction. At present he lives in Lebanon, Ohio, and works in a factory in Cincinnati.

His first wife died March 24, 1928. Later he was married to widow Dockie Rowe at Dwale, Kentucky.

#### James Franklin Walters

Jim Frank Walters was born in 1884 on the Walters Fork of Grassy Creek, Morgan County. His parents were Marion and Mary Jane Walters. He was baptized by W. L. Lacy when he was fifteen. In 1912 he was ordained and began preaching. While he has held numerous pastorates, the greatest part of his energies have been given to evangelism.

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<sup>1</sup>Most of these facts were told me by Mr. Nickell, June, 1940.

<sup>2</sup>The youngest son is the author of this thesis.

At the age of eighteen he was married to Cora Holliday and to them have been born eight children, seven still living. Jim Frank lives on a farm on the Walters Fork of Grassy Creek.

Mr. Walters was County Evangelist from 1914 to 1940 excepting for two years. The Kentucky State Missionary Board gave him from \$50 to \$100 for four years. In numerous instances when churches have got run down, Jim Frank has been called in to revive them. He may preach for a week end, or a week or two. He will have all those who have drifted away, and all the other members because all are imperfect-- in fact, the whole church to come forward and let it be known that they intend to do better. Then they take a new page in the church book and write in the names of all who had been "reclaimed."

Jim Frank keeps a close record of his labors and makes a report to each Annual Meeting. He tries to get his brethren to do the same by talking about it or making a motion in the Annual at almost every meeting. The others listen and maybe vote their consent on the motion, but do nothing about it. I took Jim Frank's records in the Annual minutes from 1927 to and including 1936 and gained some interesting facts (the most but not all of his work had been in Morgan County, but the report covered all). In that ten-year period he had received only \$2,523. He had baptized 382 and reclaimed 883.<sup>1</sup>

In almost every church in Morgan County will be found an elder or two who will "talk in public." He will lead in prayer, "introduce the service," and maybe say a few words when visiting neighboring churches. There used to be more of these "lay preachers" than at present. Maybe they should not be called lay preachers,

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<sup>1</sup>Minutes Annual Meeting, 1927-1936.

because none of the preachers in the county consider the ministry as a profession. Dozens of names could be mentioned here, but I want to mention only one. He is Daniel Boone Williams of the Williams Creek Church. I mention him because I want to quote a brief of his prayer. He starts it at a moderate pitch and gets louder as he goes along until he gets close to the end and then he lowers his voice again. Here is his prayer (not exact, but close to it),

Precious Father we thank Thee for this one more privilege to return unto Thee our most heart-felt thanks. We thank Thee for sparing our lives and watching over us through another day; and enabling us to humble ourselves on our bended knees (as humble a position as we have ever learned how) to thank Thee for all the blessings we have received from the dawn of our earliest existence down to the present time. Realizing that past blessings will not suffice, we ask Thee to continue until you are through with us on this old earth.

Dear Lord, if we have done anything contrary to Thy divine will, we ask you to forgive us, for it was of the head and not of the heart.

Kind Heavenly Father, we ask you to remember all whom duty enjoins us to pray for--both saint and sinner the world over. Do have mercy on those out on the 'bar'n hills of sin' and spare them a little longer that they may see the 'ur' of their way and come to Thee before it is everlastingly too late.

Kind Heavenly Father, we ask you to remember the sick in this disobedient neighborhood and 'round about and elsewhere." Wilt Thou be pleased to strengthen and heal them if it is Thy will, O Lord.

Precious Father, we ask you to remember Thy people wherever they may be. Fill their hearts with Thy Holy Spirit. Give them knowledge and strength that they may not fail the counsel to die like men and women.

Now, dear Lord, as we are not 'heered' for our loud speaking and long continuance before Thee, we ask you to go with us all through this journey of life as we sojourn on this Thy footstool. We ask you to stand by us in death, hand us down to our graves in peace and on the morn of that great and noble resurrection, when the trump of God shall sound so loud as to wake up the dead, own and crown us as Thy own; take our worried souls home to rest in Beulah Land where we can sing and shout throughout that world that has no end and Amen!



Four other young preachers should be mentioned. Glenn Lawson, Hobart McGuire, Bascum Hopkins, and Luke Bolin are Morgan County boys training for the ministry. Mr. Lawson lives in Morgan County. The other three live outside and the latter two are in college. But I shall not write about them. What success they make in the ministry remains to be seen.

## SUMMARY: CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The study of the Churches of Christ in Morgan County has brought some enlightening facts to the front. The first is, that although the Restoration Movement was taken to the county by so eminent a protagonist as John Smith, that some of the chief characteristics of the Restoration Movement have been neglected. The first is the weekly observance of the Lord's Supper. We believe that the New Testament teaches that Christians are to meet on the Lord's Day (not Sabbath Day, nor Christian Sabbath) to observe the ordinance that Christ placed in the Church to symbolize his death. This is the primary purpose of meeting. Yet, the Churches of Christ in Morgan County, excepting West Liberty, have never done this. When the churches were established they followed the example of the Baptists and had services one week end out of each month. At that time they observed the Lord's Supper. At present the West Liberty Church has the Communion each Lord's Day, but the most of the others even do not observe it when they do have preaching. Some have not observed the Lord's Supper for years. Even at the Annual Meetings the Lord's Supper is not served.

We may wonder at this failure to follow the New Testament concerning the observance of the ordinance of Communion. The first reason is the habit of monthly meeting, which was about as much as could be expected when the members had long distances to travel over poor roads or trails. The loose organization of the church, without a program of training for elders and deacons, also adds to the lethargy concerning the ordinance. Many churches are willing to observe it, if someone happens to bring the emblems. If no one goes to the trouble, they simply fail to observe the Supper. Another important factor is a division among the preachers concerning the way the Communion should

served. Some say that it should be passed through the audience and others argue that all who wish to commune should come up front. They compromise by not having it at all. The main factory, however, that produces the laxness concerning the Lord's Supper has not been mentioned. We must remember that the county is strongly Baptist, and that they have the "sacraments" of footwashing and communion once a year. This influence is so strong that a handful of our own members have accepted the Baptist doctrine. While the mass of them reject the Baptist position, it has crept into and does influence the practice of the churches. Of course, they will not wash feet as a church ordinance, but unconsciously they associate footwashing with the Lord's Supper, and consequently, they observe neither.

According to the pattern of the New Testament Church, each congregation is supposed to have elders and deacons. These are to be men answering certain requirements. They are not elected to honorary offices, but to fulfill certain functions. The churches of Morgan County, with the possible exception of West Liberty, think that if a man is once selected as an elder or deacon, he is always an elder or deacon. Some of them have yearly elections, but the dominant belief is "once an elder, always an elder." One may cease being a deacon by being elevated to the eldership, but the only way an elder can cease being an elder is to move, die, or get drunk and be kicked out of the church. Usually, the only church elections will be held when some officer dies and another is elected to take his place. This procedure often works to a detriment to the churches. A good old man who has been an elder for a long time becomes an invalid or semi-invalid; although unable to attend, he is still considered an elder. No one will be elected to take his place until he dies. Now the respect is commendable,

but when he becomes unable to fulfill his tasks, another should be selected who can. Let him remain an elder, of course, but see that another man who is competent will be elected to do the work an elder should do. Anyone who is familiar with the situation, though, knows that such a man is often hard to find. Some churches have only one or two elders and about the same number of deacons. The old men are dying off and the younger men have not taken their places. The local leadership is poor indeed, but there is no attempt to produce a better one.

An organized program of religious education does not exist among the Churches of Christ in Morgan County. There is not one young peoples' society. Only two Sunday Schools are very active. Some others are making a feeble attempt to carry on, but the idea of the Sunday School as the teaching and evangelistic arm of the church is foreign to Morgan County. (Of course, they are not greatly out of step with large numbers of churches that do have big Sunday Schools every Lord's Day). None of the churches have an effective program of evangelism. Even the old way of having a "big meeting" once a year has largely been discarded. About the only time a church has a revival is when it gets so run down that some of the members feel something must be done. Then a preacher is called to revive the church. He may preach for a week or two and baptize a few people, but his main objective is to get the members to "reconsecrate." If he succeeds, all of the members, elders and deacons included, will make a public acknowledgment of their determination to do better. Seldom, though, is anything done to train the local leadership. After the revival is over the church carries on as it did before it was disturbed. Maybe these emotional fevers do aid in keeping the churches going, but a church

that has no Sunday School, no Communion, no young peoples' society, no ladies' work, no resident minister--whose only activity is week end preaching (with stress on the "week") once a month--cannot expect much from its members. Considering all these things, it is amazing that the churches make as much progress as they do.

The Annual Meetings are old and well established. They offer excellent opportunities for the churches to plan ways of helping each other and furthering the cause of Christ. The attendants always have a big time, have fine fellowship, and maybe hear a lot of preaching. These things are fine, but a close examination makes us realize that the Annuals accomplish only a small amount of the good that they are capable of accomplishing.

The ministers of the county receive very little remuneration for their service. In the "good old days" they did not need it, but today, it costs money to ride a bus or drive a car. While the most of the people are poor, the preachers are too, and the churches could surely do better than they are now. Think of a church with seventy-one members giving its preacher only \$5 in a whole year--seven cents per member! Even the county seat church, which has 135 members (some of which occupy good positions), pays its minister only \$300 a year. The fact is that in some of the churches money is seldom mentioned, and an offering is never taken for the preacher. Of course, they believe in "helping" the pastor and if anyone wants to give him anything they "simply hand it to him." Here, again, is revealed the influence of the Baptists. The majority of the local Baptists do not believe in taking a public offering to "pay the preacher." If a church does, the minister is accused of "preaching for money." This situation makes it impossible for a man to give all his time to the ministry.

In some way he must earn a living. This, too, has influenced boys from the county who have gone away to school and trained to be preachers, to go some place else. They want to give all their time to the ministry, but cannot in Morgan County. Consequently, they go where they can be full-time preachers.

In summing up the situation in a few words, these things must be said. The Churches of Christ in Morgan County were established and grew when the county was isolated. Many capable preachers for that day were produced. Their education was limited but it was usually a little above the average of the community. They were Bible readers and served the churches in a very acceptable way. The meeting house was not solely religious. It was, in reality, the community center. About the only place to go was there, so large crowds, church members and non-members, attended. The present century has witnessed large numbers of people (including church members) leaving the county. Thus the churches have suffered. Recently, paved roads, cars, radios, daily papers, better education, commercial amusements, etc. have entered the county. These things have brought it out of its century of comparative isolation. Morgan is becoming a modern, progressive county. Things are changing and changing rapidly. Now, the churches were built and so developed as to answer the spiritual needs of an isolated society. That society is now dying. Old things are passing away. The ox team and mule have given away to the V8. Mud beds called roads are being replaced by modern highways. Year by year, the educational standards are being lifted. Larger numbers of Morgan County boys and girls are going to college. When these students return, they often feel alienated from the church. The obvious fact is that the Churches of Christ in Morgan County are failing to keep pace with progress. The same thing

is true of practically all the religious groups in the county. They have failed to open their eyes and see that their very world is changing and to realize that the changing process has only begun. While the Gospel does not change, the manner in which it is made operative in human life does change. The old, old story dates back to Christ and the Apostles, but it must be put in forms and language that men in every generation can understand. If it is not, the message is lost. To prevent it from being lost in Morgan County, the church must acknowledge changed conditions; it must make some changes in order to bring the message home to the hearts of the present citizens of the county. It must reinterpret the Gospel of Christ to the present day people of the county in such a way that they will be led to Christ-- in the same way that the church spoke to our ancestors in their day and led them to salvation.

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South Fork Regular Primitive Baptist Church in possession of Festus Havens, Malone, Ky.

White Oak Church of Christ in possession of Lula Elam, White Oak, Ky.

Old Grassy Church of Christ in possession of Kelly Nickell, Mize, Ky.

West Liberty Church of Christ in possession of Miss Florence McGuire, West Liberty, Ky.

Blairs Mills Church of Christ in possession of Mrs. Frank Miles, Blairs Mills, Ky.

Salem Church of Christ in possession of Lucien Nickell, Peyton, Ky.

Toms Branch Church of Christ in possession of Mrs. Pearlle Barker, Omer, Ky.

Williams Creek Church of Christ in possession of Mrs. Ova Maxey, Elamton, Ky.

Bethany Church of Christ in possession of Noah Nickell, Matthew, Ky.

Lacy Creek Church of Christ in possession of Henry Cox, Florress, Ky.

#### IV. CORRESPONDENCE

Mrs. W. S. Cook, Beaver Falls, Pa., Feb. 19, 1941.

W. H. Book, Orlando, Fla., July 12, 1940.

D. H. Havens, London, Ky., March, 1941.

Dr. H. G. Haney, Richmond, Va., Aug. 15, 1940.

O. W. Williams, McArthur, Ohio, Apr. 2, 1941.

Mrs. Ollie McGuire, Yocum, Ky., Feb., 1941.

Miss Gypsy Griffeth, White Oak, Ky., Feb., 1941.

#### V. CONFERENCES

Mrs. Opal Elam, West Liberty, Ky.

Yander Wrather, West Liberty, Ky.

Ova Haney, West Liberty, Ky.

B. T. Morris, Caney, Ky.

Kenneth Clay, West Liberty, Ky.

Ruben Cassity, West Liberty, Ky.

Kelly Nickell, Mize, Ky.

Loren Nickell, Mize, Ky.

Mrs. Mary E. McGuire, Ezel, Ky.

Mrs. Ezra Wells, West Liberty, Ky.

Mrs. Nancy M. Maple, Hazel Green, Ky.

J. F. Walters, Nickell, Ky.

Harlen Murphy, West Liberty, Ky.

Hickman Nickell, Peyton, Ky.

S. Monroe Nickell, West Liberty, Ky.

W. C. Nickell, Morgan County, Ky.

Mrs. Francis Elam, White Oak, Ky.

Robert Halsey, Wrigley, Ky.

Arthur Gathman, Malone, Ky.

A. J. Williams, Dingus, Ky.

Mrs. W. Canada Nickell, Matthew, Ky.

J. K. Bolin, Lebanon, Ohio.

Notes: I have also talked to hundreds of others.



Bethany (Tarkill) 1940



Blair's Mill 1940





Greasy Creek Church 1940



Old Grassy Church 1940





Lacy Creek 1940



Salem 1940



White Oak 1940



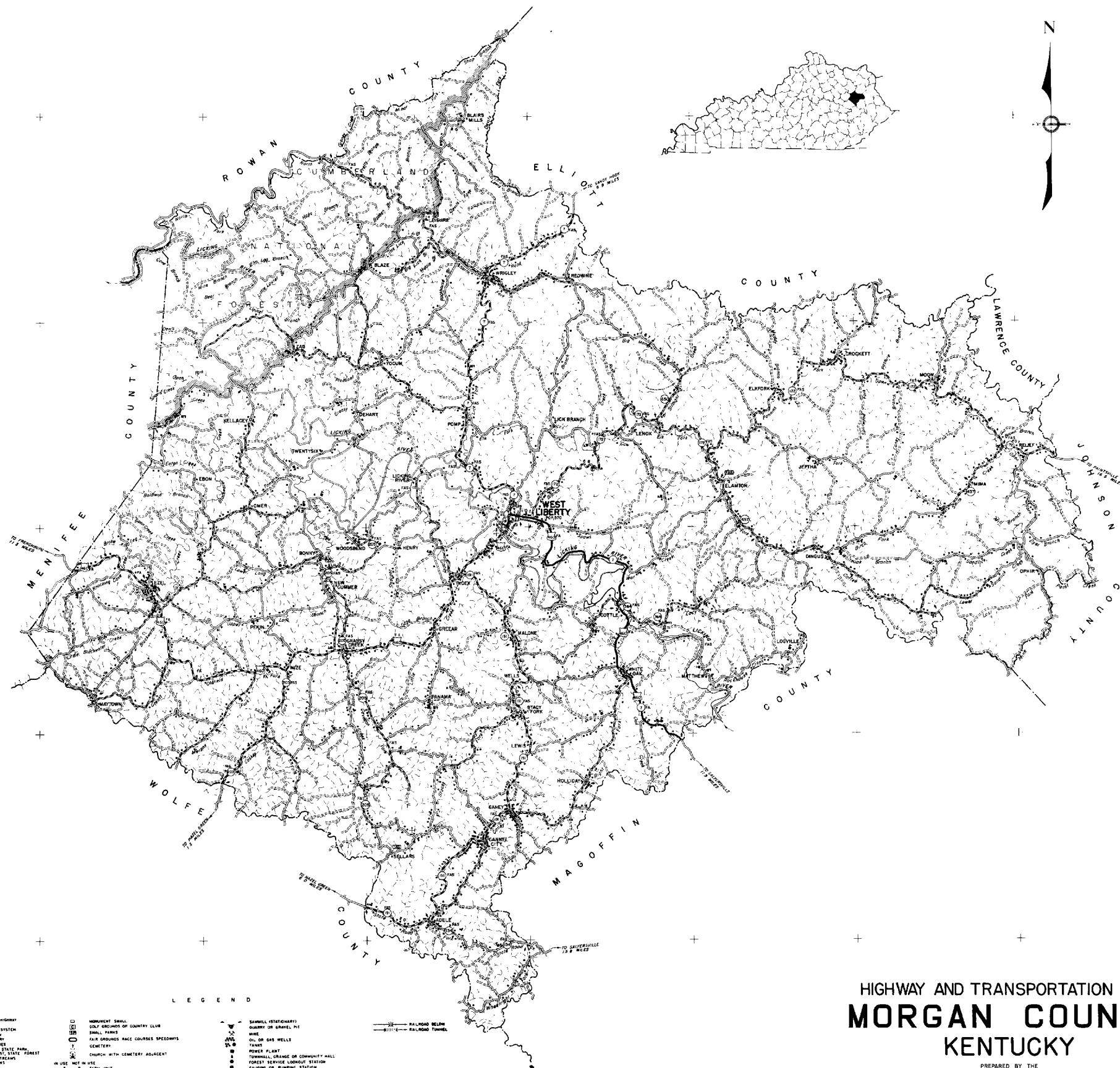
Williams Creek (Calosse) 1940





West Liberty 1940





# HIGHWAY AND TRANSPORTATION MAP

## MORGAN COUNTY

### KENTUCKY

PREPARED BY THE  
KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF HIGHWAYS  
IN COOPERATION WITH THE  
FEDERAL WORKS AGENCY  
PUBLIC ROADS ADMINISTRATION  
DATA OBTAINED FROM  
STATE-WIDE HIGHWAY PLANNING SURVEY

SCALE  $\frac{1}{125000}$

1937

[illegible][illegible]

1 SAMUEL (STATIONARY)  
 2 QUARRY OR GRAVEL PILE  
 3 WARE  
 4 OIL OR GAS WELLS  
 5 TANKS  
 6 POWER PLANT  
 7 TOWNSHIP OFFICE OR COMMUNITY HALL  
 8 FOREST SERVICE LOOKOUT STATION  
 9 RAISING OR PUMPING STATION  
 10 MINING OR QUARRYING STATION  
 11 STATE GARAGE  
 12 RAILROAD STATION  
 13 FISHING, HUNTING, CAMPERY OR SMALL GRAIN MILL  
 14 FRESH AIR FARMED OR REST HOMES  
 15 FARM  
 16 INSTITUTIONAL  
 17 CATHOLIC STATION  
 18 CATH. CHURCH  
 19 TOWNIST CAMP  
 20 MUNICIPAL PARK  
 21 PLAYGROUND, BALL PITCHES ETC  
 22 BATHING BEACHES  
 23 SCenic SPOTS  
 24 CAMP FAMES  
 25 FISH PRESERVERS  
 26 RAILROAD RAIL NUMBER TRACKS USED BY SINGLE  
 27 RAILROAD STATION  
 28 RAILROAD GRADE CROSSING  
 29 RAILROAD ABOVE

Diagram illustrating various road types and their corresponding symbols:

- RAILROAD BELOW RAILROAD TUNNEL
- TRAIL
- UNIMPROVED ROAD
- GRADE AND GRAVEL
- SOIL SURFACE NO METAL SURFACING
- LOW TYPE BITUMEN
- PAVED ROAD
- MILEAGE INDICATOR

### ROAD TYPES

TRAIL  
 PRIMITIVE ROAD  
 UNIMPROVED ROAD  
 GRADE AND GRAINED ROAD  
 SOIL SURFACE ROAD (NINE WASTE  
 METAL SURFACE ROAD  
 LOW TYPE BITUMINOUS ROAD  
 PAVED ROAD  
 MILEAGE INDICATED

1937

1991

POLYCONIC PROJECTION

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HIGHWAY AND TRANSPORTATION MAP MORGAN C